



JOSEPH CONRAD
1857-1924

AN OUTCAST OF THE ISLANDS

ALMAYER'S FOLLY

A Story of an Eastern River

JOSEPH CONRAD

With an Introduction by

OLIVER WARNER



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INTRODUCTION

1

"IF I HAD not got to know Almayer pretty well, it is almost certain there would never have been a line of mine in print." Conrad wrote that sentence in some reminiscences, published in 1912, which appear in collected editions of his work under the title of *A Personal Record*. There is a characteristic touch of exaggeration about it, but the facts are as follows.

Early in 1887, being then twenty-nine years old, he held a master mariner's certificate in the British mercantile marine, and was serving as first mate in the *Highland Forest*, a sailing-ship bound from Amsterdam to Samarang in Java. The captain was John McWhirr, whose name, features and temperament were later to be given permanence in the pages of *Typhoon*, though in that story he commands a steamer.

During the long voyage to the East, Conrad was struck in the back by a falling spar, which knocked him down and made him afterwards subject to "inexplicable periods of powerlessness, sudden accesses of mysterious pain." As a result of the mishap, he took his discharge at Samarang on 1st July, and went to Singapore, where he was in hospital for some weeks.

Towards the end of August, Conrad embarked as mate of the small steamship *Vidar*. She belonged to an Arab, and she sailed under the Dutch flag from Singapore to Bulungan in Borneo, visiting many out of the way places *en route*. Her cargo was usually rubber, cane, gutta-percha, gum and resin.

The *Vidar's* company included Chinese and Malay seamen and engineers, and in her, between 22nd August 1887 and 5th January 1888, Conrad made five or six round voyages, in "that part of the Eastern seas," to quote his own words, from which "I have carried away into my writing life the greatest number of suggestions." 'Suggestions' is an under statement. Three entire novels, *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, and *The Rescue* have as their background the tropical life which Conrad absorbed so eagerly; much of *Lord Jim* derives from the same scene, and a handful of his finest stories. It is scarcely credible that those few months could have revealed such an apparently inexhaustible vein of gold.

Almayer's Folly was the first book that Conrad ever wrote. It took him five years, and it was begun some time after he had left

the *Vidar*. The character of Almayer was based on a man he met at Bulungan who long held his imagination. What attracted him was the contrast in his make-up between dream and performance; between ambition and capacity. Almayer must have had about him a certain bitter flavour of decay—but it was at least a flavour. He was a man of mystery in a way to which none destined to worldly success could have aspired. Ruin sometimes attracts the artist, because, with his mind's eye, he can fill in what might have been: it was so here.

Almayer's Folly is by any standards a remarkable first book. It appeared, thanks to the enthusiasm of a notable publisher's reader, Edward Garnett, in the year, 1895, which was memorable in that it produced *The Time Machine* of H. G. Wells, and a major novel by Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*. It was an exotic newcomer, and, for a first venture, it was a success. *An Outcast of the Islands* appeared in the year following, the result, so Conrad liked to say, of Garnett's casual remark: "You have the style; you have the temperament; why not write another?"

Conrad had one of those uncommon minds to which time is strictly relative. His wife used to say that he insisted on quite a different wedding anniversary from that of strict chronology. His writing equally lacks precision of date. Characters appear and disappear through his stories at varying stages in their lives, and it would need courage (even if it were worth while) to try to piece together an ordered career for such a man as Captain Lingard, whose presence shadows the scene in *An Outcast of the Islands*, and who is still an active memory in *Almayer's Folly*.

Yet matters are clear enough. Between the end of *An Outcast* and the beginning of *Almayer*, Kaspar Almayer has grown older, his wife odder, and Nina, their half-caste child, has come to womanhood. Nina is one of the strongest links between the two books and it seems only right, therefore, that sequence of event rather than mere publication date should decide which story should follow which. Although in this volume *An Outcast of the Islands* is, logically, printed first, *Almayer's Folly* is not in any rigid sense a sequel: yet its ending, the wretched death of Almayer, is the natural conclusion of the two long-separated tragedies which dominate his life. Those tragedies are bound up with passionate, blinded love between man and woman. In the stretch of Conrad's work, so varied, so powerful and so much his own, it is a very rare theme indeed.

is the scene of both these books, is unique in literature. The river Pantai flows swiftly, turbulently, eternally, its canoes bearing their whispering human freightage, loving, intriguing, trading. The scene is based, so M. Jean-Aubry assures us in his life of Conrad, on memory of Bulungan, which is on the eastern side of Borneo. It is likely enough. It is equally likely that the real Almayer had at least some correspondence with Conrad's creation; that there was an actual Tom Lingard, and even a real Willems. In fact, an industrious searcher among the records of eastern seafaring might well find prototypes for many of the characters in these two books. What he could never discover is the secret of the novelist's transmutation: in his pages, his men and women live in their own right.

In the two novels, the reader is presented with studies of two protégés of Captain Tom Lingard, a sea-rover known from Honolulu to Madagascar. One of them, Willems, betrays him. The other, Almayer, he unwittingly betrays. "To Lingard—simple himself—all things were simple," says Conrad. It is so. Lingard has a talent for over-simplification.

First, Willems. He is a man who has been rescued and cherished as a youth by Lingard, and trained for the sea. Then, leaving his patron for a job ashore with a merchant, Hudig, he rises to be confidential clerk in the business-house. He later betrays the trust imposed in him, and is found out. Meanwhile, he has been trapped into marrying his employer's half-caste daughter. When his financial transgression is known generally in Macassar, Willems flies to the security of Lingard's brig, the *Flash*, on which he has spent so much of his youth.

Lingard bears him away to Sambir, and leaves him with his other waif, Almayer. Almayer, we learn, has in earlier days also served Hudig, but has left him to become Lingard's trading partner at Sambir. In the expectation of becoming the rover's heir, Almayer has married the daughter of a Sulu pirate who has been adopted by the captain.

The two men, one a fugitive and the other warped and disappointed, do not fall out, for they have never, as it were, fallen in. Both are deeply disillusioned, Almayer because the realisation of wealth is always eluding him, Willems because—although he can scarcely believe it—he has over-stepped himself. No one will ever confide in him again.

At Sambir, Willems, desperate and utterly without companionship in Almayer, falls in love—although love is perhaps too polite a word for his state—with the Arab girl Aissa. Her name is like a hiss, and so, in a way, is her nature. It is fierce, ruthless, single-minded.

When Willems finds that Almayer will not set him up as a rival trader he betrays Lingard's secret to the sea-Arabs by guiding a ship into the river. In so doing, he ruins the monopoly of trade enjoyed by his benefactor, and by Almayer. Lingard, suddenly returning, condemns Willems not to the death he might have dealt him, but to the living hell of Aissa's company. In her arms, says Conrad, "it seemed to him that he was peering into a sombre hollow, into a deep black hole full of decay and of whitened bones into an immense and inevitable grave full of corruption where sooner or later he must, unavoidably, fall."

Aissa is later confronted with Willems' wretched wife, and with his child. They have been brought to Sambir by the misguided Lingard, and at Almayer's instigation they go in pursuit of Willems. Aissa shoots her lover, and it is perhaps a merciful end for a man who has become an outcast indeed.

In *An Outcast of the Islands*, Almayer, who plays a subordinate part, is shown as having one delight in life, and one only, his child Nina. In *Almayer's Folly*, Nina, having survived, untouched, an experiment in education assigned to emphasise her western blood, has returned to her inharmonious father and mother. There then comes into the life of the far from peaceful settlement a romantic Malay, Dain, son of a rajah of the islands. Nina realises that here is the man to match her own nature. Her Malay blood is strong. White people repudiate her. From the moment the two meet it is clear that their feeling for one another will be as passionate, though on an altogether different plane, as that of Willems and Aissa.

Dain is soon in trouble with the Dutch. While running gunpowder into places where gunpowder should not be taken, he is the instrument of the death of two sailors. He becomes a fugitive. He returns to Sambir, but Almayer is deceived into thinking he has been drowned in trying to cross the river. By a subterfuge, he escapes, and Nina joins him. Their secret is betrayed by the slave Taminah, who is also in love with Dain. Almayer pursues his daughter, but his heart is broken by her utter refusal to return to him.

There is nothing left in life for Almayer. The days which remain to him are shortened by opium. The settlement is left to the Arab interlopers, and to the Malays. In a few years scarcely a memory of the white man will linger in Sambir.

3

Conrad called *An Outcast of the Islands* "the most tropical of my Eastern tales." It is true. A steamy heat pervades it; and indeed,

towards the end of the book even the writing, which in Conrad is usually so controlled, seems to relax into melodrama. Little redeems Willems: the reader cannot feel sorrow for him, or (in this book) for Almayer. The one hero the reader is offered is the over-simple, ever-generous Lingard.

With *Almayer's Folly* it is otherwise. Not only is the writing more consistent, more representative of the best in Conrad, but the passing of the years, if they have not brought Almayer the fortune he has thought about so unremittingly, have given him a tragic humanity he seems to lack in the earlier tale. *Almayer's Folly* is indeed sharper in outline than its successor, and its excitement is never unnaturally stretched. Moreover, it has many passages of loaded beauty. Conrad's work is strewn with jewels, but even in his later, most assured novels there are few pages lovelier than those given over to the life and awareness of Taminah, in Chapter Eight.

"In that supple figure, straight as an arrow, so graceful and free in its walk, behind those soft eyes that spoke of nothing but of unconscious resignation, there slept all feelings and all passions, all hopes and all fears, the curse of life and the consolation of death. And she knew nothing of it all. She lived like the tall palms amongst whom she was passing now, seeking the light, desiring the sunshine, fearing the storm, unconscious of either. The slave had no hope, and knew of no change. She knew of no other sky, no other water, no other forest, no other world, no other life. She had no wish, no hope, no love, no fear except of a blow, and no vivid feeling but that of occasional hunger. And she closed her eyes to the murmur of the water below her, to the whisper of the warm wind above, ignorant of the never-ceasing life of that tropical nature that spoke to her in vain with the thousand faint voices of the near forest, with the breath of the tepid wind; and in the heavy scents that lingered around her head; in the white wraiths of morning mist that hung over her in the solemn hush of, all creation before the dawn."

It is not hard to find such writing in Conrad, and even elsewhere in *Almayer's Folly*. It is one of the many reasons why he is rightly held to be, not only master of a highly-wrought prose, but one of the best *illuminators* of humanity in all its rich variety.

OLIVER WARNER

AN OUTCAST OF THE ISLANDS

To
Edward Lancelot Sanderson

PUES EL DELITO
MAYOR DEL HOMBRE
ES HABER NACITO

Calderon

PART ONE

I

WHEN he stepped off the straight and narrow path of his peculiar honesty, it was with an inward assertion of unflinching resolve to fall back again into the monotonous but safe stride of virtue as soon as his little excursion into the wayside quagmires had produced the desired effect. It was going to be a short episode—a sentence in brackets, so to speak—in the flowing tale of his life: a thing of no moment, to be done unwillingly, yet neatly, and to be quickly forgotten. He imagined that he could go on afterwards looking at the sunshine, enjoying the shade, breathing in the perfume of flowers in the small garden before his house. He fancied that nothing would be changed, that he would be able as heretofore to tyrannize good-humouredly over his half-caste wife, to notice with tender contempt his pale yellow child, to patronize loftily his dark-skinned brother-in-law, who loved pink neckties and wore patent-leather boots on his little feet, and was so humble before the white husband of the lucky sister. Those were the delights of his life, and he was unable to conceive that the moral significance of any act of his could interfere with the very nature of things, could dim the light of the sun, could destroy the perfume of the flowers, the submission of his wife, the smile of his child, the awe-struck respect of Leonard da Souza and of all the Da Souza family. That family's admiration was the great luxury of his life. It rounded and completed his existence in a perpetual assurance of unquestionable superiority. He loved to breathe the coarse incense they offered before the shrine of the successful white man; the man that had done them the honour to marry their daughter, sister, cousin; the rising man sure to climb very high; the confidential clerk of Hudig & Co. They were a numerous and an unclean crowd, living in ruined bamboo houses, surrounded by neglected compounds, on the outskirts of Macassar. He kept them at arm's length and even further off, perhaps, having no illusions as to their worth. They were a half-caste lazy lot, and he saw them as they were—ragged, lean, unwashed, undersized men of various ages, shuffling about aimlessly in slippers; motionless old women who looked like monstrous bags of pink calico stuffed with shapeless lumps of fat, and deposited askew upon decaying rattan chairs in shady corners

of dusty verandahs; young women, slim and yellow, big-eyed, long-haired, moving languidly amongst the dirt and rubbish of their dwellings as if every step they took was going to be their very last. He heard their shrill quarrellings, the squalling of their children, the grunting of their pigs; he smelt the odours of the heaps of garbage in their courtyards: and he was greatly disgusted. But he fed and clothed that shabby multitude; those degenerate descendants of Portuguese conquerors; he was their providence; he kept them singing his praises in the midst of their laziness, of their dirt, of their immense and hopeless squalor: and he was greatly delighted. They wanted much, but he could give them all they wanted without ruining himself. In exchange he had their silent fear, their loquacious love, their noisy veneration. It is a fine thing to be a providence, and to be told so on every day of one's life. It gives one a feeling of enormously remote superiority, and Willems revelled in it. He did not analyze the state of his mind, but probably his greatest delight lay in the unexpressed but intimate conviction that, should he close his hand, all those admiring human beings would starve. His munificence had demoralized them. An easy task. Since he descended amongst them and married Joanna they had lost the little aptitude and strength for work they might have had to put forth under the stress of extreme necessity. They lived now by the grace of his will. This was power. Willems loved it.

In another, and perhaps a lower plane, his days did not want for their less complex but more obvious pleasures. He liked the simple games of skill—billiards; also games not so simple, and calling for quite another kind of skill—poker. He had been the aptest pupil of a steady-eyed, sententious American, who had drifted mysteriously into Macassar from the wastes of the Pacific, and, after knocking about for a time in the eddies of town life, had drifted out enigmatically into the sunny solitudes of the Indian Ocean. The memory of the Californian stranger was perpetuated in the game of poker—which became popular in the capital of Celebes from that time—and in a powerful cocktail, the recipe for which is transmitted—in the Kwang-tung dialect—from head boy to head boy of the Chinese servants in the Sunda Hotel even to this day. Willems was a connoisseur in the drink and an adept at the game. Of those accomplishments he was moderately proud. Of the confidence reposed in him by Hudig—the master—he was boastfully and obtrusively proud. This arose from his great benevolence, and from an exalted sense of his duty to himself and the world at large. He experienced that irresistible impulse to impart information which is inseparable from gross ignorance. There is always some one thing which the

ignorant man knows, and that thing is the only thing worth knowing; it fills the ignorant man's universe. Willems knew all about himself. On the day when, with many misgivings, he ran away from a Dutch East-Indiaman in Samarang roads, he had commenced that study of himself, of his own ways, of his own abilities, of those fate-compelling qualities of his which led him toward that lucrative position which he now filled. Being of a modest and diffident nature, his successes amazed, almost frightened him, and ended—as he got over the succeeding shocks of surprise—by making him ferociously conceited. He believed in his genius and in his knowledge of the world. Others should know of it also; for their own good and for his greater glory. All those friendly men who slapped him on the back and greeted him noisily should have the benefit of his example. For that he must talk. He talked to them conscientiously. In the afternoon he expounded his theory of success over the little tables, dipping now and then his moustache in the crushed ice of the cocktails; in the evening he would often hold forth, cue in hand, to a young listener across the billiard table. The billiard balls stood still as if listening also, under the vivid brilliance of the shaded oil lamps hung low over the cloth; while away in the shadows of the big room the Chinaman marker would lean wearily against the wall, the blank mask of his face looking pale under the mahogany marking-board; his eyelids dropped in the drowsy fatigue of late hours and in the buzzing monotony of the unintelligible stream of words poured out by the white man. In a sudden pause of the talk the game would recommence with a sharp click and go on for a time in the flowing soft whirr and the subdued thuds as the balls rolled zig-zagging towards the inevitably successful cannon. Through the big windows and the open doors the salt dampness of the sea, the vague smell of mould and flowers from the garden of the hotel drifted in and mingled with the odour of lamp oil, growing heavier as the night advanced. The players' heads dived into the light as they bent down for the stroke, springing back again smartly into the greenish gloom of broad lampshades; the clock ticked methodically; the unmoved Chinaman continuously repeated the score in a lifeless voice, like a big talking doll—and Willems would win the game. With a remark that it was getting late, and that he was a married man, he would say a patronizing good-night and step out into the long, empty street. At that hour its white dust was like a dazzling streak of moonlight where the eye sought repose in the dimmer gleam of rare oil lamps. Willems walked homewards, following the line of walls overtopped by the luxuriant vegetation of the front gardens. The houses right and left were hidden behind the black masses

of flowering shrubs. Willems had the street to himself. He would walk in the middle, his shadow gliding obsequiously before him. He looked down on it complacently. The shadow of a successful man! He would be slightly dizzy with the cocktails and with the intoxication of his own glory. As he often told people, he came east fourteen years ago—a cabin boy. A small boy. His shadow must have been very small at that time; he thought with a smile that he was not aware then he had anything—even a shadow—which he dared call his own. And now he was looking at the shadow of the confidential clerk of Hudig & Co. going home. How glorious! How good was life for those that were on the winning side! He had won the game of life; also the game of billiards. He walked faster, jingling his winnings, and thinking of the white stone days that had marked the path of his existence. He thought of the trip to Lombok for ponies—that first important transaction confided to him by Hudig; then he reviewed the more important affairs; the quiet deal in opium; the illegal traffic in gunpowder; the great affair of smuggled firearms, the difficult business of the Rajah of Goak. He carried that last through by sheer pluck; he had bearded the savage old ruler in his council room; he had bribed him with a gilt glass coach, which, rumour said, was used as a hen-coop now; he had over-persuaded him; he had bested him in every way. That was the way to get on. He disapproved of the elementary dishonesty that dips the hand in the cash-box, but one could evade the laws and push the principles of trade to their furthest consequences. Some call that cheating. Those are the fools, the weak, the contemptible. The wise, the strong, the respected, have no scruples. Where there are scruples there can be no power. On that text he preached often to the young men. It was his doctrine and he, himself, was a shining example of its truth.

Night after night he went home thus, after a day of toil and pleasure, drunk with the sound of his own voice celebrating his own prosperity. On his thirtieth birthday he went home thus. He had spent in good company a nice, noisy evening, and, as he walked along the empty street, the feeling of his own greatness grew upon him, lifted him above the white dust of the road, and filled him with exultation and regrets. He had not done himself justice over there in the hotel, he had not talked enough about himself, he had not impressed his hearers enough. Never mind. Some other time. Now he would go home and make his wife get up and listen to him. Why should she not get up?—and mix a cocktail for him—and listen patiently. Just so. She shall. If he wanted he could make all the Da Souza family get up. He had only to say a word and they would all come and sit silently

in their night vestments on the hard, cold ground of his compound and listen, as long as he wished to go on explaining to them from the top of the stairs, how great and good he was. They would. However, his wife would do—for to-night.

His wife! He winced inwardly. A dismal woman with startled eyes and dolorously drooping mouth, that would listen to him in pained wonder and mute stillness. She was used to those night discourses now. She had rebelled once—at the beginning. Only once. Now, while he sprawled in the long chair and drank and talked, she would stand at the further end of the table, her hands resting on the edge, her frightened eyes watching his lips, without a sound, without a stir, hardly breathing, till he dismissed her with a contemptuous: "Go to bed, dummy." She would draw a long breath then and trail out of the room, relieved but unmoved. Nothing could startle her, make her scold or make her cry. She did not complain, she did not rebel. That first difference of theirs was decisive. Too decisive, thought Willems, discontentedly. It had frightened the soul out of her body apparently. A dismal woman! A damn'd business altogether! What the devil did he want to go and saddle himself . . . Ah! Well! he wanted a home, and the match seemed to please Hudig, and Hudig gave him the bungalow, that flower-bowered house to which he was wending his way in the cool moonlight. And he had the worship of the Da Souza tribe. A man of his stamp could carry off anything, do anything, aspire to anything. In another five years those white people who attended the Sunday card-parties of the Governor would accept him—half-caste wife and all! Hooray! He saw his shadow dart forward and wave a hat, as big as a rum barrel, at the end of an arm several yards long. . . . Who shouted hooray? . . . He smiled shamefacedly to himself, and, pushing his hands deep into his pockets, walked faster with a suddenly grave face.

Behind him—to the left—a cigar end glowed in the gateway of Mr. Vinck's front yard. Leaning against one of the brick pillars, Mr. Vinck, the cashier of Hudig & Co., smoked the last cheroot of the evening. Amongst the shadows of the trimmed bushes Mrs. Vinck crunched slowly, with measured steps, the gravel of the circular path before the house.

"There's Willems going home on foot—and drunk I fancy," said Mr. Vinck over his shoulder. "I saw him jump and wave his hat."

The crunching of the gravel stopped.

"Horrid man," said Mrs. Vinck, calmly. "I have heard he beats his wife."

"Oh no, my dear, no," muttered absently Mr. Vinck, with a

vague gesture. The aspect of Willems as a wife-beater presented to him no interest. How women do misjudge! If Willems wanted to torture his wife he would have recourse to less primitive methods. Mr. Vinck knew Willems well, and believed him to be very able, very smart—objectionably so. As he took the last quick draws at the stump of his cheroot, Mr. Vinck reflected that the confidence accorded by Hudig to Willems was open, under the circumstances, to loyal criticism from Hudig's cashier.

"He is becoming dangerous; he knows too much. He will have to be got rid of," said Mr. Vinck aloud. But Mrs. Vinck had gone in already, and after shaking his head he threw away his cheroot and followed her slowly.

Willems walked on homeward weaving the splendid web of his future. The road to greatness lay plainly before his eyes, straight and shining, without any obstacle that he could see. He had stepped off the path of honesty, as he understood it, but he would soon regain it, never to leave it any more! It was a very small matter. He would soon put it right again. Meantime his duty was not to be found out, and he trusted in his skill, in his luck, in his well-established reputation that would disarm suspicion if anybody dared to suspect. But nobody would dare! True, he was conscious of a slight deterioration. He had appropriated temporarily some of Hudig's money. A deplorable necessity. But he judged himself with the indulgence that should be extended to the weaknesses of genius. He would make reparation and all would be as before; nobody would be the loser for it, and he would go on unchecked toward the brilliant goal of his ambition.

Hudig's partner!

Before going up the steps of his house he stood for awhile, his feet well apart, chin in hand, contemplating mentally Hudig's future partner. A glorious occupation. He saw him quite safe; solid as the hills; deep—deep as an abyss; discreet as the grave.

2

THE sea, perhaps because of its saltiness, roughens the outside but keeps sweet the kernel of its servants' soul. The old sea; the sea of many years ago, whose servants' were devoted slaves and went from youth to age or to a sudden grave without needing to open the book of life, because they could look at eternity reflected on the element that gave the life and dealt the death. Like a beautiful and unscrupulous woman, the sea of the past was glorious in its smiles, irresistible in its anger, capricious, enticing, illogical, irresponsible; a thing to love, a thing to fear. It cast a spell, it gave joy, it lulled gently into bound-

less faith; then with quick and causeless anger it killed. But its cruelty was redeemed by the charm of its inscrutable mystery, by the immensity of its promise, by the supreme witchery of its possible favour. Strong men with childlike hearts were faithful to it, were content to live by its grace—to die by its will. That was the sea before the time when the French mind set the Egyptian muscle in motion and produced a dismal but profitable ditch. Then a great pall of smoke sent out by countless steamboats was spread over the restless mirror of the Infinite. The hand of the engineer tore down the veil of the terrible beauty in order that greedy and faithless landlubbers might pocket dividends. The mystery was destroyed. Like all mysteries, it lived only in the hearts of its worshippers. The hearts changed; the men changed. The once loving and devoted servants went out armed with fire and iron, and conquering the fear of their own hearts became a calculating crowd of cold and exacting masters. The sea of the past was an incomparably beautiful mistress, with inscrutable face, with cruel and promising eyes. The sea of to-day is a used-up drudge, wrinkled and defaced by the churned-up wakes of brutal propellers, robbed of the enslaving charm of its vastness, stripped of its beauty, of its mystery and of its promise.

Tom Lingard was a master, a lover, a servant of the sea. The sea took him young, fashioned him body and soul; gave him his fierce aspect, his loud voice, his fearless eyes, his stupidly guileless heart. Generously it gave him his absurd faith in himself, his universal love of creation, his wide indulgence, his contemptuous severity, his straightforward simplicity of motive and honesty of aim. Having made him what he was, womanlike, the sea served him humbly and let him bask unharmed in the sunshine of its terribly uncertain favour. Tom Lingard grew rich on the sea and by the sea. He loved it with the ardent affection of a lover, he made light of it with the assurance of perfect mastery, he feared it with the wise fear of a brave man, and he took liberties with it as a spoiled child might do with a paternal and good-natured ogre. He was grateful to it, with the gratitude of an honest heart. His greatest pride lay in his profound conviction of its faithfulness—in the deep sense of his unerring knowledge of its treachery.

The little brig *Flash* was the instrument of Lingard's fortune. They came north together—both young—out of an Australian port, and after a very few years there was not a white man in the islands, from Palembang to Ternate, from Ombawa to Palawan, that did not know Captain Tom and his lucky craft. He was liked for his reckless generosity, for his unswerving honesty, and at first was a little feared on account of his violent temper. Very soon, however, they found him out, and the word went round that

Captain Tom's fury was less dangerous than many a man's smile. He prospered greatly. After his first—and successful—fight with the sea robbers, when he rescued, as rumour had it, the yacht of some big wig from home, somewhere down Carimata way, his great popularity began. As years went on it grew apace. Always visiting out-of-the-way places of that part of the world, always in search of new markets for his cargoes—not so much for profit as for the pleasure of finding them—he soon became known to the Malays, and by his successful recklessness in several encounters with pirates, established the terror of his name. Those white men with whom he had business, and who naturally were on the look-out for his weaknesses, could easily see that it was enough to give him his Malay title to flatter him greatly. So when there was anything to be gained by it, and sometimes out of pure and unprofitable good nature, they would drop the ceremonious “Captain Lingard” and address him half seriously as Rajah Laut—the King of the Sea.

He carried the name bravely on his broad shoulders. He had carried it many years already when the boy Willems ran barefooted on the deck of the ship *Kosmopoliet IV.* in Samarang roads, looking with innocent eyes on the strange shore and objugating his immediate surroundings with blasphemous lips, while his childish brain worked upon the heroic idea of running away. From the poop of the *Flash* Lingard saw in the early morning the Dutch ship get lumberingly under way, bound for the eastern ports. Very late in the evening of the same day he stood on the quay of the landing canal, ready to go on board of his brig. The night was starry and clear; the little custom-house building was shut up, and as the gharry that brought him down disappeared up the long avenue of dusty trees leading to the town, Lingard thought himself alone on the quay. He roused up his sleeping boat-crew and stood waiting for them to get ready, when he felt a tug at his coat and a thin voice said, very distinctly—

“English captain.”

Lingard turned round quickly, and what seemed to be a very lean boy jumped back with commendable activity.

“Who are you? Where do you spring from?” asked Lingard, in startled surprise.

From a safe distance the boy pointed toward a cargo lighter moored to the quay.

“Been hiding there, have you?” said Lingard. “Well, what do you want? Speak out, confound you. You did not come here to scare me to death, for fun, did you?”

The boy tried to explain in imperfect English, but very soon Lingard interrupted him.

"I see," he exclaimed, "you ran away from the big ship that sailed this morning. Well, why don't you go to your countrymen here?"

"Ship gone only a little way—to Sourabaya. Make me go back to the ship," explained the boy.

"Best thing for you," affirmed Lingard with conviction.

"No," retorted the boy. "me want stop here; not want go home. Get money here; home no good."

"This beats all my going a-fishing," commented the astonished Lingard. "It's money you want? Well! well! And you were not afraid to run away, you bag of bones, you!"

The boy intimated that he was frightened of nothing but of being sent back to the ship. Lingard looked at him in meditative silence.

"Come closer," he said at last. He took the boy by the chin, and turning up his face gave him a searching look. "How old are you?"

"Seventeen."

"There's not much of you for seventeen. Are you hungry?"

"A little."

"Will you come with me, in that brig there?"

The boy moved without a word towards the boat and scrambled into the bows.

"Knows his place," muttered Lingard to himself as he stepped heavily into the stern sheets and took up the yoke lines. "Give way there."

The Malay boat crew lay back together, and the gig sprang away from the quay heading towards the brig's riding light.

Such was the beginning of Willems' career.

Lingard learned in half an hour all that there was of Willems' commonplace story. Father outdoor clerk of some shipbroker in Rotterdam; mother dead. The boy quick in learning, but idle in school. The straitened circumstances in the house filled with small brothers and sisters sufficiently clothed and fed but otherwise running wild, while the disconsolate widower tramped about all day in a shabby overcoat and imperfect boots on the muddy quays, and in the evening piloted wearily the half-intoxicated foreign skippers amongst the places of cheap delights, returning home late, sick with too much smoking and drinking—for company's sake—with these men, who expected such attentions in the way of business. Then the offer of the good-natured captain of *Kosmopoliet IV.*, who was pleased to do something for the patient and obliging fellow; young Willems' great joy, his still greater disappointment with the sea that looked so charming from afar, but proved so hard and exacting on closer acquaintance—and

then this running away by a sudden impulse. The boy was hopelessly at variance with the spirit of the sea. He had an instinctive contempt for the honest simplicity of that work which led to nothing he cared for. Lingard soon found this out. He offered to send him home in an English ship, but the boy begged hard to be permitted to remain. He wrote a beautiful hand, became soon perfect in English, was quick at figures; and Lingard made him useful in that way. As he grew older his trading instincts developed themselves astonishingly, and Lingard left him often to trade in one island or another while he, himself, made an intermediate trip to some out-of-the-way place. On Willems expressing a wish to that effect, Lingard let him enter Hudig's service. He felt a little sore at that abandonment because he had attached himself, in a way, to his protégé. Still he was proud of him, and spoke up for him loyally. At first it was, "Smart boy that—never make a seaman though." Then when Willems was helping in the trading he referred to him as "that clever young fellow." Later when Willems became the confidential agent of Hudig, employed in many a delicate affair, the simple-hearted old seaman would point an admiring finger at his back and whisper to whoever stood near at the moment, "Long-headed chap that; deuced long-headed chap. Look at him. Confidential man of old Hudig. I picked him up in a ditch, you may say, like a starved cat. Skin and bone. 'Pon my word I did. And now he knows more than I do about island trading. Fact. I am not joking. More than I do," he would repeat, seriously, with innocent pride in his honest eyes.

From the safe elevation of his commercial successes Willems patronized Lingard. He had a liking for his benefactor, not unmixed with some disdain for the crude directness of the old fellow's methods of conduct. There were, however, certain sides of Lingard's character for which Willems felt a qualified respect. The talkative seaman knew how to be silent on certain matters that to Willems were very interesting. Besides, Lingard was rich, and that in itself was enough to compel Willems' unwilling admiration. In his confidential chats with Hudig, Willems generally alluded to the benevolent Englishman as the "lucky old fool" in a very distinct tone of vexation; Hudig would grunt an unqualified assent, and then the two would look at each other in a sudden immobility of pupils fixed by a stare of unexpressed thought.

"You can't find out where he gets all that india-rubber, hey Willems?" Hudig would ask at last, turning away and bending over the papers on his desk.

"No, Mr. Hudig. Not yet. But I am trying," was Willems' invariable reply, delivered with a ring of regretful deprecation.

"Try! Always try! You may try! You think yourself clever perhaps," rumbled on Hudig without, looking up. "I have been trading with him twenty—thirty years now. The old fox. And I have tried. Bah!"

He stretched out a short, podgy leg and contemplated the bare instep and the grass slipper hanging by the toes. "You can't make him drunk?" he would add, after a pause of stertorous breathing.

"No, Mr. Hudig, I can't really," protested Willems, earnestly.

"Well, don't try. I know him. Don't try," advised the master, and, bending again over his desk, his staring bloodshot eyes close to the paper, he would go on tracing laboriously with his thick fingers the slim unsteady letters of his correspondence, while Willems waited respectfully for his further good pleasure before asking, with great deference—

"Any orders, Mr. Hudig?"

"Hm! yes. Go to Bun-Hin yourself and see the dollars of that payment counted and packed, and have them put on board the mail-boat for Ternate. She's due here this afternoon."

"Yes, Mr. Hudig."

"And look here. If the boat is late, leave the case in Bun-Hin's godown till to-morrow. Seal it up. Eight seals as usual. Don't take it away till the boat is here."

"No, Mr. Hudig."

"And don't forget about these opium cases. It's for to-night. Use my own boatmen. Tranship them from the *Caroline* to the Arab barque," went on the master in his hoarse undertone. "And don't you come to me with another story of a case dropped overboard like last time," he added, with sudden ferocity, looking up at his confidential clerk.

"No, Mr. Hudig. I will take care."

"That's all. Tell that pig as you go out that if he doesn't make the punkah go a little better I will break every bone in his body," finished up Hudig, wiping his purple face with a red silk handkerchief nearly as big as a counterpane.

Noiselessly Willems went out, shutting carefully behind him the little green door through which he passed to the warehouse. Hudig, pen in hand, listened to him bullying the punkah boy with profane violence, born of unbounded zeal for the master's comfort, before he returned to his writing amid the rustling of papers fluttering in the wind sent down by the punkah that waved in wide sweeps above his head.

Willems would nod familiarly to Mr. Vinck, who had his desk close to the little door of the private office, and march down the warehouse with an important air. Mr. Vinck—extreme dislike

lurking in every wrinkle of his gentlemanly countenance—would follow with his eyes the white figure flitting in the gloom amongst the piles of bales and cases till it passed out through the big archway into the glare of the street.

3

THE opportunity and the temptation were too much for Willems, and under the pressure of sudden necessity he abused that trust which was his pride, the perpetual sign of his cleverness and a load too heavy for him to carry. A run of bad luck at cards, the failure of a small speculation undertaken on his own account, an unexpected demand for money from one or another member of the Da Souza family—and almost before he was well aware of it he was off the path of his peculiar honesty. It was such a faint and ill-defined track that it took him some time to find out how far he had strayed amongst the brambles of the dangerous wilderness he had been skirting for so many years, without any other guide than his own convenience and that doctrine of success which he had found for himself in the book of life—in those interesting chapters that the Devil has been permitted to write in it, to test the sharpness of men's eyesight and the steadfastness of their hearts. For one short, dark and solitary moment he was dismayed, but he had that courage that will not scale heights, yet will wade bravely through the mud—if there be no other road. He applied himself to the task of restitution, and devoted himself to the duty of not being found out. On his thirtieth birthday he had almost accomplished the task—and the duty had been faithfully and cleverly performed. He saw himself safe. Again he could look hopefully towards the goal of his legitimate ambition. Nobody would dare to suspect him, and in a few days there would be nothing to suspect. He was elated. He did not know that his prosperity had touched then its high-water mark, and that the tide was already on the turn.

Two days afterwards he knew. Mr. Vinck, hearing the rattle of the door-handle, jumped up from his desk—where he had been tremulously listening to the loud voices in the private office—and buried his face in the big safe with nervous haste. For the last time Willems passed through the little green door leading to Hudig's sanctum, which, during the past half-hour, might have been taken—from the fiendish noise within—for the cavern of some wild beast. Willems' troubled eyes took in the quick impression of men and things as he came out from the place of his humiliation. He saw the scared expression of the punkah boy;

the Chinamen tellers sitting on their heels with unmovable faces turned up blankly towards him while their arrested hands hovered over the little piles of bright guilders ranged on the floor: Mr. Vinck's shoulder-blades with the fleshy rims of two red ears above. He saw the long avenue of gin cases stretching from where he stood to the arched doorway beyond which he would be able to breathe perhaps. A thin rope's end lay across his path and he saw it distinctly, yet stumbled heavily over it as if it had been a bar of iron. Then he found himself in the street at last, but could not find air enough to fill his lungs. He walked towards his home, gasping.

As the sound of Hudig's insults that lingered in his ears grew fainter by the lapse of time, the feeling of shame was replaced slowly by a passion of anger against himself and still more against the stupid concourse of circumstances that had driven him into his idiotic indiscretion. Idiotic indiscretion; that is how he defined his guilt to himself. Could there be anything worse from the point of view of his undeniable cleverness? What a fatal aberration of an acute mind! He did not recognize himself there. He must have been mad. That's it. A sudden gust of madness. And now the work of long years was destroyed utterly. What would become of him?

Before he could answer that question he found himself in the garden before his house, Hudig's wedding gift. He looked at it with a vague surprise to find it there. His past was so utterly gone from him that the dwelling which belonged to it appeared to him incongruous standing there intact, neat, and cheerful in the sunshine of the hot afternoon. The house was a pretty little structure all doors and windows, surrounded on all sides by the deep verandah supported on slender columns clothed in the green foliage of creepers, which also fringed the overhanging eaves of the high-pitched roof. Slowly, Willems mounted the dozen steps that led to the verandah. He paused at every step. He must tell his wife. He felt frightened at the prospect, and his alarm dismayed him. Frightened to face her! Nothing could give him a better measure of the greatness of the change around him, and in him. Another man—and another life with the faith in himself gone. He could not be worth much if he was afraid to face that woman.

He dared not enter the house through the open door of the dining-room, but stood irresolute by the little work-table where trailed a white piece of calico, with a needle stuck in it, as if the work had been left hurriedly. The pink-crested cockatoo started, on his appearance, into clumsy activity and began to climb laboriously up and down his perch, calling "Joanna" with indistinct loudness and a persistent screech that prolonged the

last syllable of the name as if in a peal of insane laughter. The screen in the doorway moved gently once or twice in the breeze, and each time Willems started slightly, expecting his wife, but he never lifted his eyes, although straining his ears for the sound of her footsteps. Gradually he lost himself in his thoughts, in the endless speculation as to the manner in which she would receive his news—and his orders. In this preoccupation he almost forgot the fear of her presence. No doubt she will cry, she will lament, she will be helpless and frightened and passive as ever. And he would have to drag that limp weight on and on through the darkness of a spoiled life. Horrible! Of course he could not abandon her and the child to certain misery or possible starvation. The wife and the child of Willems. Willems the successful, the smart; Willems the conf . . . Pah! And what was Willems now? Willems the . . . He strangled the half-born thought, and cleared his throat to stifle a groan. Ah! Won't they talk to-night in the billiard-room—his world, where he had been first—all those men to whom he had been so superciliously condescending. Won't they talk with surprise, and affected regret, and grave faces, and wise nods. Some of them owed him money, but he never pressed anybody. Not he. Willems, the prince of good fellows, they called him. And now they will rejoice, no doubt, at his downfall. A crowd of imbeciles. In his abasement he was yet aware of his superiority over those fellows, who were merely honest or simply not found out yet. A crowd of imbeciles! He shook his fist at the evoked image of his friends, and the startled parrot fluttered its wings and shrieked in desperate fright.

In a short glance upwards Willems saw his wife come round the corner of the house. He lowered his eyelids quickly, and waited silently till she came near and stood on the other side of the little table. He would not look at her face, but he could see the red dressing-gown he knew so well. She trailed through life in that red dressing-gown, with its row of dirty blue bows down the front, stained, and hooked on awry; a torn flounce at the bottom following her like a snake as she moved languidly about, with her hair negligently caught up, and a tangled wisp straggling untidily down her back. His gaze travelled upwards from bow to bow, noticing those that hung only by a thread, but it did not go beyond her chin. He looked at her lean throat, at the obtrusive collarbone visible in the disarray of the upper part of her attire. He saw the thin arm and the bony hand clasping the child she carried, and he felt an immense distaste for those encumbrances of his life. He waited for her to say something, but as he felt her eyes rest on him in unbroken silence he sighed and began to speak.

It was a hard task. He spoke slowly, lingering amongst the memories of this early life in his reluctance to confess that this was the end of it and the beginning of a less splendid existence. In his conviction of having made her happiness in the full satisfaction of all material wants he never doubted for a moment that she was ready to keep him company on no matter how hard and stony a road. He was not elated by this certitude. He had married her to please Hudig, and the greatness of his sacrifice ought to have made her happy without any further exertion on his part. She had years of glory as Willems' wife, and years of comfort, of loyal care, and of such tenderness as she deserved. He had guarded her carefully from any bodily hurt; and of any other suffering he had no conception. The assertion of his superiority was only another benefit conferred on her. All this was a matter of course, but he told her all this so as to bring vividly before her the greatness of her loss. She was so dull of understanding that she would not grasp it else. And now it was at an end. They would have to go. Leave this house, leave this island, go far away where he was unknown. To the English Strait-Settlements perhaps. He would find an opening there for his abilities—and juster men to deal with than old Hudig. He laughed bitterly.

"You have the money I left at home this morning, Joanna?" he asked. "We will want it all now."

As he spoke those words he thought he was a fine fellow. Nothing new that. Still, he surpassed there his own expectations. Hang it all, there are sacred things in life, after all. The marriage tie was one of them, and he was not the man to break it. The solidity of his principles caused him great satisfaction, but he did not care to look at his wife, for all that. He waited for her to speak. Then he would have to console her; tell her not to be a crying fool; to get ready to go. Go where? How? When? He shook his head. They must leave at once; that was the principal thing. He felt a sudden need to hurry up his departure.

"Well, Joanna," he said, a little impatiently—"don't stand there in a trance. Do you hear? We must . . ."

He looked up at his wife, and whatever he was going to add remained unspoken. She was staring at him with her big, slanting eyes, that seemed to him twice their natural size. The child, its dirty little face pressed to its mother's shoulder, was sleeping peacefully. The deep silence of the house was not broken, but rather accentuated, by the low mutter of the cockatoo, now very still on its perch. As Willems was looking at Joanna her upper lip was drawn up on one side, giving to her melancholy face a vicious expression altogether new to his experience. He stepped back in his surprise.

"Oh! You great man!" she said distinctly, but in a voice that was hardly above a whisper.

Those words, and still more her tone, stunned him as if somebody had fired a gun close to his ear. He stared back at her stupidly.

"Oh! you great man!" she repeated slowly, glancing right and left as if meditating a sudden escape. "And you think that I am going to starve with you. You are nobody now. You think my mamma and Leonard would let me go away? And with you! With you," she repeated scornfully, raising her voice, which woke up the child and caused it to whimper feebly.

"Joanna!" exclaimed Willems.

"Do not speak to me. I have heard what I have waited for all these years. You are less than dirt, you that have wiped your feet on me. I have waited for this. I am not afraid now. I do not want you; do not come near me. Ah—h!" she screamed shrilly, as he held out his hand in an entreating gesture—"Ah! Keep off me! Keep off me! Keep off!"

She backed away, looking at him with eyes both angry and frightened. Willems stared motionless, in dumb amazement at the mystery of anger and revolt in the head of his wife. Why? What had he ever done to her? This was the day of injustice indeed. First Hudig—and now his wife. He felt a terror at this hate that had lived stealthily so near him for years. He tried to speak, but she shrieked again, and it was like a needle through his heart. Again he raised his hand.

"Help!" called Mrs. Willems, in a piercing voice. "Help!"

"Be quiet! You fool!" shouted Willems, trying to drown the noise of his wife and child in his own angry accents and rattling violently the little zinc table in his exasperation.

From under the house, where there were bathrooms and a tool closet, appeared Leonard, a rusty iron bar in his hand. He called threateningly from the bottom of the stairs.

"Do not hurt her, Mr. Willems. You are a savage. Not at all like we, whites."

"You too!" said the bewildered Willems. "I haven't touched her. Is this a madhouse?" He moved towards the stairs, and Leonard dropped the bar with a clang and made for the gate of the compound. Willems turned back to his wife.

"So you expected this," he said. "It is a conspiracy. Who's that sobbing and groaning in the room? Some more of your precious family. Hey?"

She was more calm now, and putting hastily the crying child in the big chair walked towards him with sudden fearlessness.

"My mother," she said, "my mother who came to defend me from you—man from nowhere; a vagabond!"

"You did not call me a vagabond when you hung round my neck—before we were married," said Willems, contemptuously.

"You took good care that I should not hang round your neck after we were," she answered, clenching her hands, and putting her face close to his. "You boasted while I suffered and said nothing. What has become of your greatness; of our greatness—you were always speaking about? Now I am going to live on the charity of your master. Yes. That is true. He sent Leonard to tell me so. And you will go and boast somewhere else, and starve. So! Ah! I can breathe now! This house is mine."

"Enough!" said Willems, slowly, with an arresting gesture.

She leaped back, the fright again in her eyes, snatched up the child, pressed it to her breast, and, falling into a chair, drummed insanely with her heels on the resounding floor of the verandah.

"I shall go," said Willems, steadily. "I thank you. For the first time in your life you make me happy. You were a stone round my neck; you understand. I did not mean to tell you that as long as you lived, but you made me—now. Before I pass this gate you shall be gone from my mind. You made it very easy. I thank you."

He turned and went down the steps without giving her a glance, while she sat upright and quiet, with wide-open eyes, the child crying querulously in her arms. At the gate he came suddenly upon Leonard, who had been dodging about there and failed to get out of the way in time.

"Do not be brutal, Mr. Willems," said Leonard, hurriedly. "It is unbecoming between white men with all those natives looking on." Leonard's legs trembled very much, and his voice wavered between high and low tones without any attempt at control on his part. "Restrain your improper violence," he went on mumbling rapidly. "I am a respectable man of very good family, while you . . . it is regrettable . . . they all say so . . ."

"What?" thundered Willems. He felt a sudden impulse of mad anger, and before he knew what had happened he was looking at Leonard da Souza rolling in the dust at his feet. He stepped over his prostrate brother-in-law and tore blindly down the street, everybody making way for the frantic white man.

When he came to himself he was beyond the outskirts of the town, stumbling on the hard and cracked earth of reaped rice fields. How did he get there? It was dark. He must get back. As he walked towards the town slowly, his mind reviewed the events of the day and he felt a sense of bitter loneliness. His wife

had turned him out of his own house. He had assaulted brutally his brother-in-law, a member of the Da Souza family—of that band of his worshippers. He did. Well, no! It was some other man. Another man was coming back. A man without a past, without a future, yet full of pain and shame and anger. He stopped and looked round. A dog or two glided across the empty street and rushed past him with a frightened snarl. He was now in the midst of the Malay quarter whose bamboo houses hidden in the verdure of their little gardens, were dark and silent. Men, women and children slept in there. Human beings. Would he ever sleep, and where? He felt as if he was the outcast of all mankind, and as he looked hopelessly round, before resuming his weary march, it seemed to him that the world was bigger, the night more vast and more black; but he went on doggedly with his head down as if pushing his way through some thick bramble. Then suddenly he felt planks under his feet and, looking up, saw the red light at the end of the jetty. He walked quite to the end and stood leaning against the post, under the lamp, looking at the roadstead where two vessels at anchor swayed their slender rigging amongst the stars. The end of the jetty; and here in one step more the end of life; the end of everything. Better so. What else could he do? Nothing ever comes back. He saw it clearly. The respect and admiration of them all, the old habits and old affections finished abruptly in the clear perception of the cause of his disgrace. He saw all this; and for a time he came out of himself, out of his selfishness—out of the constant preoccupation of his interests and his desires—out of the temple of self and the concentration of personal thoughts.

His thoughts now wandered home. Standing in the tepid stillness of a starry tropical night he felt the breath of the bitter east wind, he saw the high and narrow fronts of tall houses under the gloom of a clouded sky; and on muddy quays he saw the shabby, high-shouldered figure—the patient, faded face of the weary man earning bread for the children that waited for him in a dingy home. It was miserable, miserable. But it would never come back. What was there in common between those things and Willems the clever, Willems the successful. He had cut himself adrift from that home many years ago. Better for him then. Better for them now. All this was gone, never to come back again; and suddenly he shivered, seeing himself alone in the presence of unknown and terrible dangers.

For the first time in his life he felt afraid of the future, because he had lost his faith, the faith in his own success. And he had destroyed it foolishly with his own hands.

His meditation which resembled slow drifting into suicide was interrupted by Lingard, who, with a loud "I've got you at last!" dropped his hand heavily on Willems' shoulder. This time it was the old seaman himself going out of his way to pick up the uninteresting waif—all that there was left of that sudden and sordid shipwreck. To Willems, the rough, friendly voice was a quick and fleeting relief followed by a sharper pang of anger and unavailing regret. That voice carried him back to the beginning of his promising career, the end of which was very visible now from the jetty where they both stood. He shook himself free from the friendly grasp, saying with ready bitterness—

"It's all your fault. Give me a push now, do, and send me over. I have been standing here waiting for help. You are the man—of all men. You helped at the beginning; you ought to have a hand in the end."

"I have better use for you than to throw you to the fishes," said Lingard seriously, taking Willems by the arm and forcing him gently to walk up the jetty. "I have been buzzing over this town like a bluebottle fly, looking for you high and low. I have heard a lot. I will tell you what, Willems; you are no saint, that's a fact. And you have not been overwise either. I am not throwing stones," he added, hastily, as Willems made an effort to get away, "but I am not going to mince matters. Never could! You keep quiet while I talk. Can't you?"

With a gesture of resignation and a half-stifled groan Willems submitted to the stronger will, and the two men paced slowly up and down the resounding planks, while Lingard disclosed to Willems the exact manner of his undoing. After the first shock Willems lost the faculty of surprise in the over-powering feeling of indignation. So it was Vinck and Leonard who had served him so. They had watched him, tracked his misdeeds, reported them to Hudig. They had bribed obscure Chinamen, wormed out confidences from tipsy skippers, got at various boatmen, and had pieced out in that way the story of his irregularities. The blackness of this dark intrigue filled him with horror. He could understand Vinck. There was no love lost between them. But Leonard! Leonard!

"Why, Captain Lingard," he burst out, "the fellow licked my boots."

"Yes, yes, yes," said Lingard, testily, "we know that, and you

did your best to cram your boots down his throat. No man likes that, my boy."

"I was always giving money to all that hungry lot," went on Willems passionately. "Always my hand in my pocket. They never had to ask twice."

"Just so. Your generosity frightened them. They asked themselves where all that came from, and concluded that it was safer to throw you overboard. After all, Hudig is a much greater man than you, my friend, and they have a claim on him also."

"What do you mean, Captain Lingard?"

"What do I mean?" repeated Lingard, slowly. "Why, you are not going to make me believe you did not know your wife was Hudig's daughter. Come now!"

Willems stopped suddenly and swayed about.

"Ah! I understand," he gasped. "I never heard . . . Lately I thought there was . . . But no, I never guessed."

"Oh, you simpleton!" said Lingard, pityingly. "'Pon my word," he muttered to himself, "I don't believe the fellow knew. Well! well! Steady now. Pull yourself together. What's wrong there. She is a good wife to you."

"Excellent wife," said Willems, in a dreary voice, looking far over the black and scintillating water.

"Very well then," went on Lingard, with increasing friendliness. "Nothing wrong there. But did you really think that Hudig was marrying you off and giving you a house and I don't know what, out of love for you?"

"I had served him well," answered Willems. "How well, you know yourself—through thick and thin. No matter what work and what risk, I was always there; always ready."

How well he saw the greatness of his work and the immensity of that injustice which was his reward. She was that man's daughter! In the light of this disclosure the facts of the last five years of his life stood clearly revealed in their full meaning. He had spoken first to Joanna at the gate of their dwelling as he went to his work in the brilliant flush of the early morning, when women and flowers are charming even to the duller eyes. A most respectable family—two women and a young man—were his next-door neighbours. Nobody ever came to their little house but the priest, a native from the Spanish islands, now and then. The young man Leonard he had met in town and was flattered by the little fellow's immense respect for the great Willems. He let him bring chairs, call the waiters, chalk his cues when playing billiards, express his admiration in choice words. He even condescended to listen patiently to Leonard's allusions to "our beloved father," a man of official position, a government agent in Koti,

where he died of cholera, alas! a victim to duty, like a good Catholic, and a good man. It sounded very respectable, and Willem's approved of those feeling references. Moreover, he prided himself upon having no colour-prejudices and no racial antipathies. He consented to drink curaçoa one afternoon on the verandah of Mrs. da Souza's house. He remembered Joanna that day, swinging in a hammock. She was untidy even then, he remembered, and that was the only impression he carried away from that visit. He had no time for love in those glorious days, no time even for a passing fancy, but gradually he fell into the habit of calling almost every day at that little house where he was greeted by Mrs. da Souza's shrill voice screaming for Joanna to come and entertain the gentleman from Hudig & Co. And then the sudden and unexpected visit of the priest. He remembered the man's flat, yellow face, his thin legs, his propitiatory smile, his beaming black eyes, his conciliating manner, his veiled hints which he did not understand at the time. How he wondered what the man wanted, and how unceremoniously he got rid of him. And then came vividly into his recollection the morning when he met again that fellow coming out of Hudig's office, and how he was amused at the incongruous visit. And that morning with Hudig! Would he ever forget it? Would he ever forget his surprise as the master, instead of plunging at once into business, looked at him thoughtfully before turning, with a furtive smile, to the papers on the desk? He could hear him now, his nose in the paper before him, dropping astonishing words in the intervals of wheezy breathing.

"Heard said . . . called there often . . . most respectable ladies . . . knew the father very well . . . estimable . . . best thing for a young man . . . settle down . . . Personally, very glad to hear . . . thing arranged. . . . Suitable recognition of valuable services. . . . Best thing—best thing to do."

And he believed! What credulity! What an ass! Hudig knew the father! Rather. And so did everybody else probably; all except himself. How proud he had been of Hudig's benevolent interest in his fate! How proud he was when invited by Hudig to stay with him at his little house in the country—where he could meet men, men of official position—as a friend. Vinck had been green with envy. Oh, yes! He had believed in the best thing, and took the girl like a gift of fortune. How he boasted to Hudig of being free from prejudices. The old scoundrel must have been laughing in his sleeve at his fool of a confidential clerk. He took the girl, guessing nothing. How could he? There had been a father of some kind to the common knowledge. Men knew him; spoke about him. A lank man of hopelessly mixed

descent, but otherwise—apparently—unobjectionable. The shady relations came out afterward, but—with his freedom from prejudices—he did not mind them, because, with their humble dependence, they completed his triumphant life., Taken in! taken in! Hudig had found an easy way to provide for the begging crowd. He had shifted the burden of his youthful vagaries on to the shoulders of his confidential clerk; and while he worked for the master, the master had cheated him; had stolen his very self from him. He was married. He belonged to that woman, no matter what she might do! . . . Had sworn . . . for all life! . . . Thrown himself away. . . . And that man dared this very morning call him a thief! Damnation!

“Let go, Lingard!” he shouted, trying to get away by a sudden jerk from the watchful old seaman. “Let me go and kill that . . .”

“No you don’t!” panted Lingard, hanging on manfully. “You want to kill, do you? You lunatic. Ah!—I’ve got you now! Be quiet, I say!”

They struggled violently, Lingard forcing Willems slowly towards the guard-rail. Under their feet the jetty sounded like a drum in the quiet night. On the shore end the native caretaker of the wharf watched the combat, squatting behind the safe shelter of some big cases. The next day he informed his friends, with calm satisfaction, that two drunken white men had fought on the jetty. It had been a great fight. They fought without arms, like wild beasts, after the manner of white men. No! nobody was killed, or there would have been trouble and a report to make. How could he know why they fought? White men have no reason when they are like that.

Just as Lingard was beginning to fear that he would be unable to restrain much longer the violence of the younger man, he felt Willems’ muscles relaxing, and took advantage of this opportunity to pin him, by a last effort, to the rail. They both panted heavily, speechless, their faces very close.

“All right,” muttered Willems at last. “Don’t break my back over this infernal rail. I will be quiet.”

“Now you are reasonable,” said Lingard, much relieved. “What made you fly into that passion?” he asked, leading him back to the end of the jetty, and, still holding him prudently with one hand, he fumbled with the other for his whistle and blew a shrill and prolonged blast. Over the smooth water of the roadstead came in answer a faint cry from one of the ships at anchor.

“My boat will be here directly,” said Lingard. “Think of what you are going to do. I sail to-night.”

“What is there for me to do, except one thing?” said Willems, gloomily.

"Look here," said Lingard; "I picked you up as a boy, and consider myself responsible for you in a way. You took your life into your own hands many years ago—but still . . ."

He paused, listening, till he heard the regular grind of the oars in the rowlocks of the approaching boat then went on again.

"I have made it all right with Hudig. You owe him nothing now. Go back to your wife. She is a good woman. Go back to her."

"Why, Captain Lingard," exclaimed Willems, "she . . ."

"It was most affecting," went on Lingard, without heeding him. "I went to your house to look for you and there I saw her in despair. It was heart-breaking. She called for you; she entreated me to find you. She spoke wildly, poor woman, as if all this was her fault."

Willems listened amazed. The blind old idiot! How queerly he misunderstood! But if it was true, if it was even true, the very idea of seeing her filled his soul with intense loathing. He did not break his oath, but he would not go back to her. Let hers be the sin of that separation, of the sacred bond broken. He revelled in the extreme purity of his heart, and he would not go back to her. Let her come back to him. He had the comfortable conviction that he would never see her again, and that through her own fault only. In this conviction he told himself solemnly that if she would come to him he would receive her with generous forgiveness, because such was the praiseworthy solidity of his principles. But he hesitated whether he would or would not disclose to Lingard the revolting completeness of his humiliation. Turned out of his house—and by his wife; that woman who hardly dared to breathe in his presence, yesterday. He remained perplexed and silent. No. He lacked the courage to tell the ignoble story.

As the boat of the brig appeared suddenly on the black water close to the jetty, Lingard broke the painful silence.

"I always thought," he said, sadly, "I always thought you were somewhat heartless, Willems, and apt to cast adrift those that thought most of you. I appeal to what is best in you; do not abandon that woman."

"I have not abandoned her," answered Willems, quickly, with conscious truthfulness. "Why should I? As you so justly observed, she has been a good wife to me. A very good, quiet, obedient, loving, wife, and I love her as much as she loves me. Every bit. But as to going back now, to that place where I . . . To walk again amongst those men who yesterday were ready to crawl before me, and then feel on my back the sting of their pitying or satisfied smiles—no! I can't. I would rather hide from them at the bottom of the sea," he went on, with resolute energy.

"I don't think, Captain Lingard," he added, more quietly, "I don't think that you realize what my position was there."

In a wide sweep of his hand he took in the sleeping shore from north to south, as if wishing it a proud and threatening good-bye. For a short moment he forgot his downfall in the recollection of his brilliant triumphs. Amongst the men of his class and occupation who slept in those dark houses he had been indeed the first.

"It is hard," muttered Lingard, pensively. "But whose the fault? Whose the fault?"

"Captain Lingard!" cried Willems, under the sudden impulse of a felicitous inspiration, "if you leave me here on this jetty—it's murder. I shall never return to that place alive, wife or no wife. You may just as well cut my throat at once."

The old seaman started. "Don't try to frighten me, Willems," he said, with great severity, and paused.

Above the accents of Willems' brazen despair he heard, with considerable uneasiness, the whisper of his own absurd conscience. He meditated for awhile with an irresolute air.

"I could tell you to go and drown yourself, and be damned to you," he said, with an unsuccessful assumption of brutality in his manner, "but I won't. We are responsible for one another—worse luck. I am almost ashamed of myself, but I can understand your dirty pride. I can! By . . ."

He broke off with a loud sigh and walked briskly to the steps, at the bottom of which lay his boat, rising and falling gently on the slight and invisible swell.

"Below there! Got a lamp in the boat? Well, light it and bring it up, one of you. Hurry now!"

He tore out a page of his pocketbook, moistened his pencil with great energy and waited, stamping his feet impatiently..

"I will see this thing through," he muttered to himself. "And I will have it all square and ship-shape; see if I don't! Are you going to bring that lamp, you son of a crippled mud-turtle? I am waiting."

The gleam of the light on the paper placated his professional anger, and he wrote rapidly, the final dash of his signature curling the paper up in a triangular tear.

"Take that to this white Tuan's house. I will send the boat back for you in half an hour."

The coxswain raised his lamp deliberately to Willems' face.

"This Tuan! Tau? I know."

"Quick then!" said Lingard, taking the lamp from him—and the man went off at a run.

"Kassi mem! To the lady herself," called Lingard after him.

Then, when the man disappeared, he turned to Willems.

"I have written to your wife," he said. "If you do not return for good, you do not go back to that house only for another parting. You must come as you stand. I won't have that poor woman tormented. I will see to it that you are not separated for long. Trust me."

Willems shivered, then smiled in the darkness.

"No fear of that," he muttered, enigmatically. "I trust you implicitly, Captain Lingard," he added, in a louder tone.

Lingard led the way down the steps, swinging the lamp and speaking over his shoulder.

"It is the second time, Willems, I take you in hand. Mind it is the last. The second time; and the only difference between then and now is that you were barefooted then and have boots now. In fourteen years. With all your smartness! A poor result that. A very poor result."

He stood for a while on the lowest platform of the steps, the light of the lamp falling on the upturned face of the stroke oar, who held the gunwhale of the boat close alongside, ready for the captain to step in.

"You see," he went on, argumentatively, fumbling about the top of the lamp, "you got yourself so crooked amongst those 'longshore quill-drivers that you could not run clear in any way. That's what comes of such talk as yours, and of such a life. A man sees so much falsehood that he begins to lie to himself. Pah!" he said, in disgust, "there's only one place for an honest man. The sea, my boy, the sea! But you never would; didn't think there was enough money in it; and now—look!"

He blew the light out, and, stepping into the boat, stretched quickly his hand towards Willems, with friendly care. Willems sat by him in silence, and the boat shoved off, sweeping in a wide circle towards the brig.

"Your compassion is all for my wife, Captain Lingard," said Willems, moodily. "Do you think I am so very happy?"

"No! no!" said Lingard, heartily. "Not a word more shall pass my lips. I had to speak my mind once, seeing that I knew you from a child, so to speak. And now I shall forget; but you are young yet. Life is very long," he went on, with unconscious sadness; "let this be a lesson to you."

He laid his hand affectionately on Willems' shoulder and they both sat silent till the boat came alongside the ship's ladder.

When on board Lingard gave orders to his mate, and leading Willems on the poop, sat on the breech of one of the brass six-pounders with which his vessel was armed. The boat went off again to bring back the messenger. As soon as it was seen returning dark forms appeared on the brig's spars; then the sails fell in

festoons with a swish of their heavy folds, and hung motionless under the yards in the dead calm of the clear and dewy night. From the forward end came the clink of the windlass, and soon afterwards the hail of the chief mate informing Lingard that the cable was hove short.

"Hold on everything," hailed back Lingard; "we must wait for the land-breeze before we let go our hold of the ground."

He approached Willems, who sat on the skylight, his body bent down, his head low, and his hands hanging listlessly between his knees.

"I am going to take you to Sambir," he said. "You've never heard of the place, have you? Well, it's up that river of mine about which people talk so much and know so little. I've found out the entrance for a ship of *Flash's* size. It isn't easy. You'll see. I will show you. You have been at sea long enough to take an interest . . . Pity you didn't stick to it. Well, I am going there. I have my own trading post in the place. Almayer is my partner. You knew him when he was at Hudig's. Oh, he lives there as happy as a king. D'ye see, I have them all in my pocket. The rajah is an old friend of mine. My word is law—and I am the only trader. No other white man but Almayer had ever been in that settlement. You will live quietly there till I come back from my next cruise to the westward. We shall see then what can be done for you. Never fear. I have no doubt my secret will be safe with you. Keep mum about my river when you get amongst the traders again. There's many would give their ears for the knowledge of it. I'll tell you something: that's where I get all my guttuh and rattans. Simply inexhaustible, my boy."

While Lingard spoke Willems looked up quickly, but soon his head fell on his breast in the discouraging certitude that the knowledge he and Hudig had wished for so much had come to him too late. He sat in a listless attitude.

"You will help Almayer in his trading if you have a heart for it," continued Lingard, "just to kill time till I come back for you. Only six weeks or so."

Over their heads the damp sails fluttered noisily in the first faint puff of the breeze; then, as the airs freshened, the brig tended to the wind, and the silenced canvas lay quietly aback. The mate spoke with low distinctness from the shadows of the quarter-deck.

"There's the breeze. Which way do you want to cast her, Captain Lingard?"

Lingard's eyes, that had been fixed aloft, glanced down at the dejected figure of the man sitting on the skylight. He seemed to hesitate for a minute.

"To the northward, to the northward," he answered, testily, as if annoyed at his own fleeting thought, "and bear a hand there. Every puff of wind is worth money in these seas."

He remained motionless, listening to the rattle of blocks and the creaking of trusses as the head-yards were hauled round. Sail was made on the ship and the windlass manned again while he stood still, lost in thought. He only roused himself when a barefooted seacannie glided past him silently on his way to the wheel.

"Put the helm aport! Hard over!" he said, in his harsh sea-voice, to the man whose face appeared suddenly out of the darkness in the circle of light thrown upwards from the binnacle lamps.

The anchor was secured, the yards trimmed, and the brig began to move out of the roadstead. The sea woke up under the push of the sharp cutwater, and whispered softly to the gliding craft in that tender and rippling murmur in which it speaks sometimes to those it nurses and loves. Lingard stood by the taff-rail listening, with a pleased smile till the *Flash* began to draw close to the only other vessel in the anchorage.

"Here, Willems," he said, calling him to his side, "d'ye see that barque here? That's an Arab vessel. White men have mostly given up the game, but this fellow drops in my wake often, and lives in hopes of cutting me out in that settlement. Not while I live, I trust. You see, Willems, I brought prosperity to that place. I composed their quarrels, and saw them grow under my eyes. There's peace and happiness there. I am more master there than his Dutch Excellency down in Batavia ever will be when some day a lazy man-of-war blunders at last against the river. I mean to keep the Arabs out of it, with their lies and their intrigues. I shall keep the venomous breed out, if it costs me my fortune."

The *Flash* drew quietly abreast of the barque, and was beginning to drop it astern when a white figure started up on the poop of the Arab vessel, and a voice called out—

"Greeting to the Rajah Laut!"

"To you greeting!" answered Lingard, after a moment of hesitating surprise. Then he turned to Willems with a grim smile. "That's Abdulla's voice," he said. "Mighty civil all of a sudden, isn't he? I wonder what it means. Just like his impudence! No matter! His civility or his impudence are all one to me. I know that this fellow will be under way and after me like a shot. I don't care! I have the heels of anything that floats in these seas" he added, while his proud and loving glance ran over and rested fondly amongst the brig's lofty and graceful spars.

"IT WAS the writing on his forehead," said Babalatchi, adding a couple of small sticks to the little fire by which he was squatting, and without looking at Lakamba who lay down supported on his elbow on the other side of the embers. "It was written when he was born that he should end his life in darkness, and now he is like a man walking in a black night—with his eyes open, yet seeing not. I knew him well when he had slaves, and many wives, and much merchandise, and trading praus, and praus for fighting. Haï—ya! He was a great fighter in the days before the breath of the Merciful put out the light in his eyes. He was a pilgrim, and had many virtues: he was brave, his hand was open, and he was a great robber. For many years he led the men that drank blood on the sea: first in prayer and first in fight! Have I not stood behind him when his face was turned to the West? Have I not watched by his side ships with high masts burning in a straight flame on the calm water? Have I not followed him on dark nights amongst sleeping men that woke up only to die? His sword was swifter than the fire from Heaven, and struck before it flashed. Haï! Tuan! Those were the days and that was a leader, and I myself was younger; and in those days there were not so many fireships with guns that deal fiery death from afar. Over the hill and over the forest—O! Tuan Lakamba! they dropped whistling fireballs into the creek where our praus took refuge, and where they dared not follow men who had arms in their hands."

He shook his head with mournful regret and threw another handful of fuel on the fire. The burst of clear flame lit up his broad, dark, and pock-marked face, where the big lips, stained with betel-juice, looked like a deep and bleeding gash of a fresh wound. The reflection of the firelight gleamed brightly in his solitary eye, lending it for a moment a fierce animation that died out together with the short-lived flame. With quick touches of his bare hands he raked the embers into a heap, then, wiping the warm ash on his waistcloth—his only garment—he clasped his thin legs with his entwined fingers, and rested his chin on his drawn-up knees. Lakamba stirred slightly without changing his position or taking his eyes off the glowing coals, on which they had been fixed in dreamy immobility.

"Yes," went on Babalatchi, in a low monotone, as if pursuing aloud a train of thought that had its beginning in the silent contemplation of the unstable nature of earthly greatness—"yes.

He has been rich and strong, and now he lives on alms: old, feeble, blind, and without companions, but for his daughter. The Rajah Patalolo gives him rice, and the pale woman—his daughter,—cooks it for him, for he has no slave."

"I saw her from afar," muttered Lakamba, disparagingly. "A she-dog with white teeth, like a woman of the Orang-Putih."

"Right, right," assented Babalatchi; "but you have not seen her near. Her mother was a woman from the west; a Baghdadi woman with veiled face. Now she goes uncovered, like our women do, for she is poor and he is blind, and nobody ever comes near them unless to ask for a charm or a blessing and depart quickly for fear of his anger and of the Rajah's hand. You have not been on that side of the river?"

"Not for a long time. If I go . . ."

"True! true!" interrupted Babalatchi, soothingly; "but I go often alone—for your good—and look—and listen. When the time comes; when we both go together towards the Rajah's campong, it will be to enter—and to remain."

Lakamba sat up and looked at Babalatchi gloomily.

"This is good talk, once, twice; when it is heard too often it becomes foolish, like the prattle of children."

"Many, many times have I seen the cloudy sky and have heard the wind of the rainy seasons," said Babalatchi, impressively.

"And where is your wisdom? It must be with the wind and the clouds of seasons past, for I do not hear it in your talk."

"Those are the words of the ungrateful!" shouted Babalatchi, with sudden exasperation. "Verily, our only refuge is with the One, the Mighty, the Redresser of . . ."

"Peace! Peace!" growled the startled Lakamba. "It is but a friend's talk."

Babalatchi subsided into his former attitude, muttering to himself. After a while he went on again in a louder voice—

"Since the Rajah Laut left another white man here in Sambir, the daughter of the blind Omar el Badavi has spoken to other ears than mine."

"Would a white man listen to a beggar's daughter?" said Lakamba, doubtfully.

"Hai! I have seen . . ."

"And what did you see? O one-eyed one!" exclaimed Lakamba, contemptuously.

"I have seen the strange white man walking on the narrow path before the sun could dry the drops of dew on the bushes, and I have heard the whisper of his voice when he spoke through the smoke of the morning fire to that woman with big eyes and a

pale skin. Woman in body, but in heart a man! She knows no fear and no shame. I have heard her voice too."

He nodded twice at Lakamba sagaciously and gave himself up to silent musing, his solitary eye fixed immovably upon the straight wall of forest on the opposite bank. Lakamba lay silent, staring vacantly. Under them Lingard's own river rippled softly amongst the piles supporting the bamboo platform of the little watch-house before which they were lying. Behind the house the ground rose in a gentle swell of a low hill cleared of the big timber, but thickly overgrown with the grass and bushes, now withered and burnt up in the long drought of the dry season. This old rice clearing, which had been several years lying fallow, was framed on three sides by the impenetrable and tangled growth of the untouched forest, and on the fourth came down to the muddy river bank. There was not a breath of wind on the land or river, but high above, in the transparent sky, little clouds rushed past the moon, now appearing in her diffused rays with the brilliance of silver, now obscuring her face with the blackness of ebony. Far away, in the middle of the river, a fish would leap now and then with a short splash, the very loudness of which measured the profundity of the overpowering silence that swallowed up the sharp sound suddenly.

Lakamba dozed uneasily off, but the wakeful Babalatchi sat thinking deeply, sighing from time to time, and slapping himself over his naked torso incessantly in a vain endeavour to keep off an occasional and wandering mosquito that, rising as high as the platform above the swarms of the riverside, would settle with a ping of triumph on the unexpected victim. The moon, pursuing her silent and toilsome path, attained her highest elevation, and chasing the shadow of the roof-leaves from Lakamba's face, seemed to hang arrested over their heads. Babalatchi revived the fire and woke up his companion, who sat up yawning and, shivering discontentedly.

Babalatchi spoke again in a voice which was like the murmur of a brook that runs over the stones: low, monotonous, persistent; irresistible in its power to wear out and to destroy the hardest obstacles. Lakamba listened, silent but interested. They were Malay adventurers; ambitious men of that place and time; the Bohemians of their race. In the early days of the settlement, before the ruler Patalolo had shaken off his allegiance to the Sultan of Koti, Lakamba appeared in the river with two small trading vessels. He was disappointed to find already some semblance of organization amongst the settlers of various races who recognized the unobtrusive sway of old Patalolo, and he was not politic enough to conceal his disappointment. He declared

himself to be a man from the east, from those parts where no white man ruled, and to be of an oppressed race, but of a princely family. And truly enough he had all the gifts of an exiled prince. He was discontented, ungrateful, turbulent; a man full of envy and ready for intrigue, with brave words and empty promises for ever on his lips. He was obstinate, but his will was made up of short impulses that never lasted long enough to carry him to the goal of his ambition. Received coldly by the suspicious Patalolo, he persisted—permission or no permission—in clearing the ground on a good spot some fourteen miles down the river from Sambir and built himself a house there, which he fortified by a high palisade. As he had many followers and seemed very reckless, the old Rajah did not think it prudent at the time to interfere with him by force. Once settled, he began to intrigue. The quarrel of Patalolo with the Sultan of Koti was of his fomenting, but failed to produce the result he expected because the Sultan could not back him up effectively at such a great distance. Disappointed in that scheme, he promptly organized an outbreak of the Bugis settlers, and besieged the old Rajah in his stockade with much noisy valour and a fair chance of success; but Lingard then appeared on the scene with the armed brig, and the old seaman's hairy forefinger, shaken menacingly in his face, quelled his martial ardour. No man cared to encounter the Rajah Laut, and Lakamba, with momentary resignation, subsided into a half-cultivator, half-trader, and nursed in his fortified house his wrath and his ambition, keeping it for use on a more propitious occasion. Still faithful to his character of a prince-pretender, he would not recognize the constituted authorities, answering sulkily the Rajah's messenger, who claimed the tribute for the cultivated fields, that the Rajah had better come and take it himself. By Lingard's advice he was left alone, notwithstanding his rebellious mood; and for many days he lived undisturbed amongst his wives and retainers, cherishing that persistent and causeless hope of better times, the possession of which seems to be the universal privilege of exiled greatness.

But the passing days brought no change. The hope grew faint and the hot ambition burnt itself out, leaving only a feeble and expiring spark amongst a heap of dull and tepid ashes of indolent acquiescence with the decrees of Fate, till Babalatchi fanned it again into a bright flame. Babalatchi had blundered upon the river while in search of a safe refuge for his disreputable head. He was a vagabond of the seas, a true Orang-Laut, living by rapine and plunder of coasts and ships in his prosperous days; earning his living by honest and irksome toil when the days of adversity were upon him. So, although at times leading the Sulu

rovers, he had also served as Serang of country ships, and in that wise had visited the distant seas, beheld the glories of Bombay, the might of the Mascati Sultan; had even struggled in a pious throng for the privilege of touching with his lips the Sacred Stone of the Holy City. He gathered experience and wisdom in many lands, and after attaching himself to Omar el Badavi, he affected great piety (as became a pilgrim), although unable to read the inspired words of the Prophet. He was brave and bloodthirsty without any affection, and he hated the white men who interfered with the manly pursuits of throat-cutting, kidnapping, slave-dealing, and fire-raising, that were the only possible occupation for a true man of the sea. He found favour in the eyes of his chief, the fearless Omar el Badavi, the leader of Brunei rovers, whom he followed with unquestioning loyalty through the long years of successful depredation. And when that long career of murder, robbery and violence received its first serious check at the hands of white men, he stood faithfully by his chief, looked steadily at the bursting shells, was undismayed by the flames of the burning stronghold, by the death of his companions, by the shrieks of their women, the wailing of their children; by the sudden ruin and destruction of all that he deemed indispensable to a happy and glorious existence. The beaten ground between the houses was slippery with blood, and the dark mangroves of the muddy creeks were full of sighs of the dying men who were stricken down before they could see their enemy. They died helplessly, for into the tangled forest there was no escape, and their swift praus, in which they had so often scoured the coast and the seas, now wedged together in the narrow creek, were burning fiercely. Babalatchi, with the clear perception of the coming end, devoted all his energies to saving if it was but only one of them. He succeeded in time. When the end came in the explosion of the stored powder-barrels, he was ready to look for his chief. He found him half dead and totally blinded, with nobody near him but his daughter Aissa:—the sons had fallen earlier in the day, as became men of their courage. Helped by the girl with the steadfast heart, Babalatchi carried Omar on board the light prau and succeeded in escaping, but with very few companions only. As they hauled their craft into the network of dark and silent creeks, they could hear the cheering of the crews of the man-of-war's boats dashing to the attack of the rover's village. Aissa, sitting on the high after-deck, her father's blackened and bleeding head in her lap, looked up with fearless eyes at Babalatchi. "They shall find only smoke, blood and dead men, and women mad with fear there, but nothing else living," she said, mournfully. Babalatchi, pressing with his right hand the deep gash on his shoulder, answered sadly:

"They are very strong. When we fight with them we can only die. Yet," he added, menacingly—"some of us still live! Some of us still live!"

For a short time he dreamed of vengeance, but his dream was dispelled by the cold reception of the Sultan of Sulu, with whom they sought refuge at first and who gave them only a contemptuous and grudging hospitality. While Omar, nursed by Aïssa, was recovering from his wounds, Babalatchi attended industriously before the exalted Presence that had extended to them the hand of protection. For all that, when Babalatchi spoke into the Sultan's ear certain proposals of a great and profitable raid, that was to sweep the islands from Ternate to Acheen, the Sultan was very angry. "I know you, you men from the west," he exclaimed, angrily. "Your words are poison in a Ruler's ears. Your talk is of fire and murder and booty—but on our heads falls the vengeance of the blood you drink. Begone!"

There was nothing to be done. Times were changed. So changed that, when a Spanish frigate appeared before the island and a demand was sent to the Sultan to deliver Omar and his companions, Babalatchi was not surprised to hear that they were going to be made the victims of political expediency. But from that same appreciation of danger to tame submission was a very long step. And then began Omar's second flight. It began arms in hand, for the little band had to fight in the night on the beach for the possession of the small canoes in which those that survived got away at last. The story of that escape lives in the hearts of brave men even to this day. They talk of Babalatchi and of the strong woman who carried her blind father through the surf under the fire of the warship from the north. The companions of that piratical and son-less Æneas are dead now, but their ghosts wander over the waters and the islands at night—after the manner of ghosts—and haunt the fires by which sit armed men, as is meet for the spirits of fearless warriors who died in battle. There they may hear the story of their own deeds, of their own courage, suffering and death, on the lips of living men. That story is told in many places. On the cool mats in breezy verandahs of Rajahs' houses it is alluded to disdainfully by impassive statesmen, but amongst armed men that throng the courtyards it is a tale which stills the murmur of voices and the tinkle of anklets; arrests the passage of the siri-vessel, and fixes the eyes in absorbed gaze. They talk of the fight, of the fearless woman, of the wise man; of long suffering on the thirsty sea in leaky canoes; of those who died . . . Many died. A few survived. The chief, the woman, and another one who became great.

There was no hint of incipient greatness in Babalatchi's unosten-

tatious arrival in Sambir. He came with Omar and Aissa in a small prau loaded with green cocoanuts, and claimed the ownership of both vessel and cargo. How it came to pass that Babalatchi, fleeing for his life in a small canoe, managed to end his hazardous journey in a vessel full of a valuable commodity, is one of those secrets of the sea that baffle the most searching inquiry. In truth nobody inquired much. There were rumours of a missing trading prau belonging to Menado, but they were vague and remained mysterious. Babalatchi told a story which—it must be said in justice to Patalolo's knowledge of the world—was not believed. When the Rajah ventured to state his doubts, Babalatchi asked him in tones of calm remonstrance whether he could reasonably suppose that two oldish men—who had only one eye amongst them—and a young woman were likely to gain possession of anything whatever by violence? Charity was a virtue recommended by the Prophet. There were charitable people, and their hand was open to the deserving. Patalolo wagged his aged head doubtfully, and Babalatchi withdrew with a shocked mien and put himself forthwith under Lakamba's protection. The two men who completed the prau's crew followed him into that magnate's campong. The blind Omar, with Aissa, remained under the care of the Rajah, and the Rajah confiscated the cargo. The prau hauled up on the mud-bank, at the junction of the two branches of the Pantai, rotted in the rain, warped in the sun, fell to pieces and gradually vanished into the smoke of household fires of the settlement. Only a forgotten plank and a rib or two, sticking neglected in the shiny ooze for a long time, served to remind Babalatchi during many months that he was a stranger in the land.

Otherwise, he felt perfectly at home in Lakamba's establishment, where his peculiar position and influence were quickly recognized and soon submitted to even by the women. He had all a true vagabond's pliability to circumstances and adaptiveness to momentary surroundings. In his readiness to learn from experience that contempt for early principles so necessary to a true statesman, he equalled the most successful politicians of any age; and he had enough persuasiveness and firmness of purpose to acquire a complete mastery over Lakamba's vacillating mind—where there was nothing stable but an all pervading discontent. He kept the discontent alive, he rekindled the expiring ambition, he moderated the poor exile's not unnatural impatience to attain a high and lucrative position. He—the man of violence—deprecated the use of force, for he had a clear comprehension of the difficult situation. From the same cause, he—the hater of white men—would to some extent admit the eventual expediency of

Dutch protection. But nothing should be done in a hurry. Whatever his master Lakamba might think, there was no use in poisoning old Patalolo, he maintained. It could be done, of course; but what then? As long as Lingard's influence was paramount—as long as Almayer, Lingard's representative, was the only great trader of the settlement, it was not worth Lakamba's while—even if it had been possible—to grasp the rule of the young state. Killing Almayer and Lingard was so difficult and so risky that it might be dismissed as impracticable. What was wanted was an alliance; somebody to set up against the white men's influence—and somebody who, while favourable to Lakamba, would at the same time be a person of a good standing with the Dutch authorities. A rich and considered trader was wanted. Such a person once firmly established in Sambir would help them to oust the old Rajah, to remove him from power or from life if there was no other way. Then it would be time to apply to the Orang Blanda for a flag; for a recognition of their meritorious services; for that protection which would make them safe for ever! The word of a rich and loyal trader would mean something with the Ruler down in Batavia. The first thing to do was to find such an ally and to induce him to settle in Sambir. A white trader would not do. A white man would not fall in with their ideas—would not be trustworthy. The man they wanted should be rich, unscrupulous, have many followers, and be a well-known personality in the islands. Such a man might be found amongst the Arab traders. Lingard's jealousy, said Babalatchi, kept all the traders out of the river. Some were afraid, and some did not know how to get there; others ignored the very existence of Sambir; a good many did not think it worth their while to run the risk of Lingard's enmity for the doubtful advantage of trade with a comparatively unknown settlement. The great majority were undesirable or untrustworthy. And Babalatchi mentioned regretfully the men he had known in his young days: wealthy, resolute, courageous, reckless, ready for any enterprise! But why lament the past and speak about the dead? There is one man—living—great—not far off . . .

Such was Babalatchi's line of policy laid before his ambitious protector. Lakamba assented, his only objection being that it was very slow work. In his extreme desire to grasp dollars and power, the unintellectual exile was ready to throw himself into the arms of any wandering cut-throat whose help could be secured, and Babalatchi experienced great difficulty in restraining him from unconsidered violence. It would not do to let it be seen that they had any hand in introducing a new element into the social and political life of Sambir. There was always a possibility of failure,

and in that case Lingard's vengeance would be swift and certain. No risk should be run. They must wait.

Meantime he pervaded the settlement, squatting in the course of each day by many household fires, testing the public temper and public opinion—and always talking about his impending departure. At night he would often take Lakamba's smallest canoe and depart silently to pay mysterious visits to his old chief on the other side of the river. Omar lived in an odour of sanctity under the wing of Patalolo. Between the bamboo fence, enclosing the houses of the Rajah, and the wild forest, there was a banana plantation, and on its further edge stood two little houses built on low piles under a few precious fruit trees that grew on the banks of a clear brook, which, bubbling up behind the house, ran in its short and rapid course down to the big river. Along the brook a narrow path led through the dense second growth of a neglected clearing to the banana plantation and to the houses in it which the Rajah had given for residence to Omar. The Rajah was greatly impressed by Omar's ostentatious piety, by his oracular wisdom, by his many misfortunes, by the solemn fortitude with which he bore his affliction. Often the old ruler of Sambir would visit informally the blind Arab and listen gravely to his talk during the hot hours of an afternoon. In the night, Babalatchi would call and interrupt Omar's repose, unrebuked. Aïssa, standing silently at the door of one of the huts, could see the two old friends as they sat very still by the fire in the middle of the beaten ground between the two houses, talking in an indistinct murmur far into the night. She could not hear their words, but she watched the two formless shadows curiously. Finally Babalatchi would rise and, taking her father by the wrist, would lead him back to the house, arrange his mats for him, and go out quietly. Instead of going away, Babalatchi, unconscious of Aïssa's eyes, often sat again by the fire, in a long and deep meditation. Aïssa looked with respect on that wise and brave man—she was accustomed to see at her father's side as long as she could remember—sitting alone and thoughtful in the silent night by the dying fire, his body motionless and his mind wandering in the land of memories, or—who knows?—perhaps groping for a road in the waste spaces of the uncertain future.

Babalatchi noted the arrival of Willems with alarm at this new accession to the white men's strength. Afterwards he changed his opinion. He met Willems one night on the path leading to Omar's house, and noticed later on, with only a moderate surprise, that the blind Arab did not seem to be aware of the new white man's visits to the neighbourhood of his dwelling. Once, coming unexpectedly in the daytime, Babalatchi fancied he could

see the gleam of a white jacket in the bushes on the other side of the brook. That day he watched Aissa pensively as she moved about preparing the evening rice; but after a while he went hurriedly away before sunset, refusing Omar's hospitable invitation, in the name of Allah, to share their meal. That same evening he startled Lakamba by announcing that the time had come at last to make the first move in their long-deferred game. Lakamba asked excitedly for explanation. Babalatchi shook his head and pointed to the flitting shadows of moving women and to the vague forms of men sitting by the evening fires in the courtyard. Not a word would he speak here, he declared. But when the whole household was reposing, Babalatchi and Lakamba passed silent amongst sleeping groups to the riverside, and, taking a canoe, paddled off stealthily on their way to the dilapidated guard-hut in the old rice-clearing. There they were safe from all eyes and ears, and could account, if need be, for their excursion by the wish to kill a deer, the spot being well known as the drinking-place of all kinds of game. In the seclusion of its quiet solitude Babalatchi explained his plan to the attentive Lakamba. His idea was to make use of Willems for the destruction of Lingard's influence.

"I know the white men, Tuan," he said, in conclusion. "In many lands have I seen them; always the slaves of their desires, always ready to give up their strength and their reason into the hands of some woman. The fate of the Believers is written by the hand of the Mighty One, but they who worship many gods are thrown into the world with smooth foreheads, for any woman's hand to mark their destruction there. Let one white man destroy another. The will of the Most High is that they should be fools. They know how to keep faith with their enemies, but towards each other they know only deception. Haï! I have seen! I have seen!"

He stretched himself full length before the fire, and closed his eyes in real or simulated sleep. Lakamba, not quite convinced, sat for a long time with his gaze riveted on the dull embers. As the night advanced, a slight white mist rose from the river, and the declining moon, bowed over the tops of the forest, seemed to seek the repose of the earth, like a wayward and wandering lover who returns at last to lay his tired and silent head on his beloved's breast.

"LEND me your gun, Almayer," said Willems, across the table on which a smoky lamp shone redly above the disorder of a finished meal. "I have a mind to go and look for a deer when the moon rises to-night."

Almayer, sitting sidewise to the table, his elbow pushed amongst the dirty plates, his chin on his breast and his legs stretched stiffly out, kept his eyes steadily on the toes of his grass slippers and laughed abruptly.

"You might say yes or no instead of making that unpleasant noise," remarked Willems, with calm irritation.

"If I believed one word of what you say, I would," answered Almayer without changing his attitude and speaking slowly, with pauses, as if dropping his words on the floor. "As it is—what's the use? You know where the gun is; you may take it or leave it. Gun. Deer. Bosh! Hunt deer! Pah! It's a . . . gazelle you are after, my honoured guest. You want gold anklets and silk sarongs for that game—my mighty hunter. And you won't get those for the asking, I promise you. All day amongst the natives. A fine help you are to me."

"You shouldn't drink so much, Almayer," said Willems, disguising his fury under an affected drawl. "You have no head. Never had, as far as I can remember, in the old days in Macassar. You drink too much."

"I drink my own," retorted Almayer, lifting his head quickly and darting an angry glance at Willems.

Those two specimens of the superior race glared at each other savagely for a minute, then turned away their heads at the same moment as if by previous arrangement, and both got up. Almayer kicked off his slippers and scrambled into his hammock, which hung between two wooden columns of the verandah so as to catch every rare breeze of the dry season, and Willems, after standing irresolutely by the table for a short time, walked without a word down the steps of the house and over the courtyard towards the little wooden jetty, where several small canoes and a couple of big white whale-boats were made fast, tugging at their short painters and bumping together in the swift current of the river. He jumped into the smallest canoe, balancing himself clumsily, slipped the rattan painter, and gave an unnecessary and violent shove, which nearly sent him headlong overboard. By the time he regained his balance the canoe had drifted some fifty yards down the river. He knelt in the bottom of his little craft and fought

the current with longsweeps of the paddle. Almayer sat up in his hammock, grasping his feet and peering over the river with parted lips till he made out the shadowy form of man and canoe as they struggled past the jetty again.

"I thought you would go," he shouted. "Won't you take the gun? Hey?" he yelled, straining his voice. Then he fell back in his hammock and laughed to himself feebly till he fell asleep. On the river, Willems, his eyes fixed intently ahead, swept his paddle right and left, unheeding the words that reached him faintly.

It was now three months since Lingard had landed Willems in Sambir and had departed hurriedly, leaving him in Almayer's care. The two white men did not get on well together. Almayer, remembering the time when they both served Hudig, and when the superior Willems treated him with offensive condescension, felt a great dislike towards his guest. He was also jealous of Lingard's favour. Almayer had married a Malay girl whom the old seaman had adopted in one of his accesses of unreasoning benevolence, and as the marriage was not a happy one from a domestic point of view, he looked to Lingard's fortune for compensation in his matrimonial unhappiness. The appearance of that man, who seemed to have a claim of some sort upon Lingard, filled him with considerable uneasiness, the more so because the old seaman did not choose to acquaint the husband of his adopted daughter with Willems' history, or to confide to him his intentions as to that individual's future fate. Suspicious from the first, Almayer discouraged Willems' attempts to help him in his trading, and then when Willems drew back, he made, with characteristic perverseness, a grievance of his unconcern. From cold civility in their relations, the two men drifted into silent hostility, then into outspoken enmity, and both wished ardently for Lingard's return and the end of a situation that grew more intolerable from day to day. The time dragged slowly. Willems watched the succeeding sunrises wondering dismally whether before the evening some change would occur in the deadly dullness of his life. He missed the commercial activity of that existence which seemed to him far off, irreparably lost, buried out of sight under the ruins of his past success—now gone from him beyond the possibility of redemption. He mooned disconsolately about Almayer's courtyard, watching from afar, with uninterested eyes, the up-country canoes discharging guttah or rattans, and loading rice or European goods on the little wharf of Lingard & Co. Big as was the extent of ground owned by Almayer, Willems yet felt that there was not enough room for him inside those neat fences. The man who, during long years, became accustomed to think of

himself as indispensable to others, felt a bitter and savage rage at the cruel consciousness of his superfluity, of his uselessness; at the cold hostility visible in every look of the only white man in this barbarous corner of the world. He gnashed his teeth when he thought of the wasted days, of the life thrown away in the unwilling company of that peevish and suspicious fool. He heard the reproach of his idleness in the murmurs of the river, in the unceasing whisper of the great forests. Round him everything stirred, moved, swept by in a rush; the earth under his feet and the heavens above his head. The very savages around him strove, struggled, fought, worked—if only to prolong a miserable existence; but they lived, they lived! And it was only himself that seemed to be left outside the scheme of creation in a hopeless immobility filled with tormenting anger and with ever-stinging regret.

He took to wandering about the settlement. Then afterwards flourishing Sambir was born in a swamp and passed its youth in malodorous mud. The houses crowded the bank, and, as if to get away from the unhealthy shore, stepped boldly into the river, shooting over it in a close row of bamboo platforms elevated on high piles, amongst which the current below spoke in a soft and unceasing plaint of murmuring eddies. There was only one path in the whole town and it ran at the back of the houses along the succession of blackened circular patches that marked the place of the household fires. On the other side the virgin forest bordered the path, coming close to it, as if to provoke impudently any passer-by to the solution of the gloomy problem of its depths. Nobody would accept the deceptive challenge. There were only a few feeble attempts at a clearing here and there, but the ground was low and the river, retiring after its yearly floods, left on each a gradually diminishing mudhole, where the imported buffaloes of the Bugis settlers wallowed happily during the heat of the day. When Willems walked on the path, the indolent men stretched on the shady side of the houses looked at him with calm curiosity, the women busy round the cooking fires would send after him wondering and timid glances, while the children would only look once, and then run away yelling with fright at the horrible appearance of the man with a red and white face. These manifestations of childish disgust and fear stung Willems with a sense of absurd humiliation; he sought in his walks the comparative solitude of the rudimentary clearings, but the very buffaloes snorted with alarm at his sight, scrambled lumberingly out of the cool mud and stared wildly in a compact herd at him as he tried to slink unperceived along the edge of the forest. One day, at some unguarded and sudden movement of his the whole herd

stampeded down the path, scattered the fires, sent the women flying with shrill cries, and left behind a track of smashed pots, trampled rice, overturned children, and a crowd of angry men brandishing sticks in loud-voiced pursuit. The innocent cause of that disturbance ran shamefacedly the gauntlet of black looks and unfriendly remarks, and hastily sought refuge in Almayer's campong. After that he left the settlement alone.

Later, when the enforced confinement grew irksome, Willems took one of Almayer's many canoes and crossed the main branch of the Pantai in search of some solitary spot where he could hide his discouragement and his weariness. He skirted in his little craft the wall of tangled verdure, keeping in the dead water close to the bank where the spreading nipa palms nodded their broad leaves over his head as if in contemptuous pity of the wandering outcast. Here and there he could see the beginnings of chopped-out pathways, and, with the fixed idea of getting out of sight of the busy river, he would land and follow the narrow and winding path, only to find that it led nowhere, ending abruptly in the discouragement of thorny thickets. He would go back slowly, with a bitter sense of unreasonable disappointment and sadness; oppressed by the hot smell of earth, dampness, and decay in that forest which seemed to push him mercilessly back into the glittering sunshine of the river. And he would recommence paddling with tired arms to seek another opening, to find another deception.

As he paddled up to the point where the Rajah's stockade came down to the river, the nipas were left behind rattling their leaves over the brown water, and the big trees would appear on the bank, tall, strong, indifferent in the immense solidity of their life, which endures for ages, to that short and fleeting life in the heart of the man who crept painfully amongst their shadows in search of a refuge from the unceasing reproach of his thoughts. Amongst their smooth trunks a clear brook meandered for a time in twining lacets before it made up its mind to take a leap into the hurrying river, over the edge of the steep bank. There was also a pathway there and it seemed frequented. Willems landed, and following the capricious promise of the track soon found himself in a comparatively clear space, where the confused tracery of sunlight fell through the branches and the foliage overhead, and lay on the stream that shone in an easy curve like a bright sword-blade dropped amongst the long and feathery grass. Further on, the path continued, narrowed again in the thick undergrowth. At the end of the first turning Willems saw a flash of white and colour, a gleam of gold like a sun-ray lost in shadow, and a vision of blackness darker than the deepest shade of the forest. He stopped,

surprised, and fancied he had heard light footsteps—growing lighter—ceasing. He looked around. The grass on the bank of the stream trembled and a tremulous path of its shivering, silver-grey tops ran from the water to the beginning of the thicket. And yet there was not a breath of wind. Somebody had passed there. He looked pensive while the tremor died out in a quick tremble under his eyes; and the grass stood high, unstirring, with drooping heads in the warm and motionless air.

He hurried on, driven by a suddenly awakened curiosity, and entered the narrow way between the bushes. At the next turn of the path he caught again the glimpse of coloured stuff and of a woman's black hair before him. He hastened his pace and came in full view of the object of his pursuit. The woman, who was carrying two bamboo vessels full of water, heard his footsteps, stopped, and putting the bamboos down half turned to look back. Willems also stood still for a minute, then walked steadily on with a firm tread, while the woman moved aside to let him pass. He kept his eyes fixed straight before him, yet almost unconsciously he took in every detail of the tall and graceful figure. As he approached her the woman tossed her head slightly back, and with a free gesture of her strong, round arm, caught up the mass of loose black hair and brought it over her shoulder and across the lower part of her face. The next moment he was passing her close, walking rigidly, like a man in a trance. He heard her rapid breathing and he felt the touch of a look darted at him from half-open eyes. It touched his brain and his heart together. It seemed to him to be something loud and stirring like a shout, silent and penetrating like an inspiration. The momentum of his motion carried him past her, but an invisible force made up of surprise and curiosity and desire spun him round as soon as he had passed.

She had taken up her burden already, with the intention of pursuing her path. His sudden movement arrested her at the first step, and again she stood straight, slim, expectant, with a readiness to dart away suggested in the light immobility of her pose. High above, the branches of the trees met in a transparent shimmer of waving green mist, through which the rain of yellow rays descended upon her head, streamed in glints down her black tresses, shone with the changing glow of liquid metal on her face, and lost itself in vanishing sparks in the sombre depths of her eyes that, wide open now, with enlarged pupils, looked steadily at the man in her path. And Willems stared at her, charmed with a charm that carries with it a sense of irreparable loss, tingling with that feeling which begins like a caress and ends in a blow, in that sudden hurt of a new emotion making its way into a human heart, with the brusque stirring of sleeping sensations

awakening suddenly to the rush of new hopes, new fears, new desires—and to the flight of one's old self.

She moved a step forward and again halted. A breath of wind that came through the trees, but in Willems' fancy seemed to be driven by her moving figure, rippled in a hot wave round his body and scorched his face in a burning touch. He drew it in with a long breath, the last long breath of a soldier before the rush of battle, of a lover before he takes in his arms the adored woman; the breath that gives courage to confront the menace of death or the storm of passion.

Who was she? Where did she come from? Wonderingly he took his eyes off her face to look round at the serried trees of the forest that stood big and still and straight, as if watching him and her breathlessly. He had been baffled, repelled, almost frightened by the intensity of that tropical life which wants the sunshine but works in gloom; which seems to be all grace of colour and form, all brilliance, all smiles, but is only the blossoming of the dead; whose mystery holds the promise of joy and beauty, yet contains nothing but poison and decay. He had been frightened by the vague perception of danger before, but now, as he looked at that life again, his eyes seemed able to pierce the fantastic veil of creepers and leaves, to look past the solid trunks, to see through the forbidding gloom—and the mystery was disclosed—enchanting subduing, beautiful. He looked at the woman. Through the checkered light between them she appeared to him with the impalpable distinctness of a dream. The very spirit of that land of mysterious forests, standing before him like an apparition behind a transparent veil—a veil woven of sunbeams and shadows.

She had approached him still nearer. He felt a strange impatience within him at her advance. Confused thoughts rushed through his head, disordered, shapeless, stunning. Then he heard his own voice asking—

“Who are you?”

“I am the daughter of the blind Omar,” she answered, in a low but steady tone. “And you,” she went on, a little louder, “you are the white trader—the great man of this place.”

“Yes,” said Willems, holding her eyes with his in a sense of extreme effort. “Yes, I am white,” Then he added, feeling as if he spoke about some other man, “But I am the outcast of my people.”

She listened to him gravely. Through the mesh of scattered hair her face looked like the face of a golden statue with living eyes. The heavy eyelids dropped slightly, and from between the long eyelashes she sent out a sidelong look: hard, keen, and narrow, like the gleam of sharp steel. Her lips were firm and

composed in a graceful curve, but the distended nostrils, the upward poise of the half-averted head, gave to her whole person the expression of a wild and resentful defiance.

A shadow passed over Willems' face. He put his hand over his lips as if to keep back the words that wanted to come out in a surge of impulsive necessity, the outcome of dominant thought that rushes from the heart to the brain and must be spoken in the face of doubt, of danger, of fear, of destruction itself.

"You are beautiful," he whispered.

She looked at him again with a glance that running in one quick flash of her eyes over his sunburnt features, his broad shoulders, his straight, tall, motionless figure, rested at last on the ground at his feet. Then she smiled. In the sombre beauty of her face that smile was like the first ray of light on a stormy daybreak that darts evanescent and pale through the gloomy clouds: the forerunner of sunrise and of thunder.

7

THERE are in our lives short periods which hold no place in memory but only as the recollection of a feeling. There is no remembrance of gesture, of action, of any outward manifestation of life; those are lost in the unearthly brilliance or in the unearthly gloom of such moments. We are absorbed in the contemplation of that something, within our bodies, which rejoices or suffers while the body goes on breathing, instinctively runs away or, not less instinctively, fights—perhaps dies. But death in such a moment is the privilege of the fortunate, it is a high and rare favour, a supreme grace.

Willems never remembered how and when he parted from Aïssa. He caught himself drinking the muddy water out of the hollow of his hand, while his canoe was drifting in mid-stream past the last houses of Sambir. With his returning wits came the fear of something unknown that had taken possession of his heart, of something inarticulate and masterful which could not speak and would be obeyed. His first impulse was that of revolt. He would never go back there. Never! He looked round slowly at the brilliance of things in the deadly sunshine and took up his paddle! How changed everything seemed! The river was broader, the sky was higher. How fast the canoe flew under the strokes of his paddle! Since when had he acquired the strength of two men or more? He looked up and down the reach at the forests of the bank with a confused notion that with one sweep of his hand he could tumble all these trees into the stream. His face

felt burning. He drank again, and shuddered with a depraved sense of pleasure at the after-taste of slime in the water.

It was late when he reached Almayer's house, but he crossed the dark and uneven courtyard, walking lightly in the radiance of some light of his own, invisible to other eyes. His host's sulky greeting jarred him like a sudden fall down a great height. He took his place at the table opposite Almayer and tried to speak cheerfully to his gloomy companion, but when the meal was ended and they sat smoking in silence he felt an abrupt discouragement, a lassitude in all his limbs, a sense of immense sadness as after some great and irreparable loss. The darkness of the night entered his heart, bringing with it doubt and hesitation and dull anger with himself and all the world. He had an impulse to shout horrible curses, to quarrel with Almayer, to do something violent. Quite without any immediate provocation he thought he would like to assault the wretched, sulky beast. He glanced at him ferociously from under his eyebrows. The unconscious Almayer smoked thoughtfully, planning to-morrow's work probably. The man's composure seemed to Willems an unpardonable insult. Why didn't that idiot talk to-night when he wanted him to? . . . on other nights he was ready enough to chatter. And such dull nonsense too! And Willems, trying hard to repress his own senseless rage, looked fixedly through the thick tobacco-smoke at the stained tablecloth.

They retired early, as usual, but in the middle of the night. Willems leaped out of his hammock with a stifled execration and ran down the steps into the courtyard. The two night watchmen, who sat by a little fire talking together in a monotonous undertone, lifted their heads to look wonderingly at the discomposed features of the white man as he crossed the circle of light thrown out by their fire. He disappeared in the darkness and then came back again, passing them close, but with no sign of consciousness of their presence on his face. Backwards and forwards he paced, muttering to himself, and the two Malays, after a short consultation in whispers left the fire quietly, not thinking it safe to remain in the vicinity of a white man who behaved in such a strange manner. They retired round the corner of the godown and watched Willems curiously through the night, till the short day-break was followed by the sudden blaze of the rising sun, and Almayer's establishment woke up to life and work.

As soon as he could get away unnoticed in the bustle of the busy riverside. Willems' crossed the river on his way to the place where he had met Aïssa. He threw himself down in the grass by the side of the brook and listened for the sound of her footsteps, The brilliant light of day fell through the irregular opening in

the high branches of the trees and streamed down, softened, amongst the shadows of big trunks. Here and there a narrow sunbeam touched the rugged bark of a tree with a golden splash, sparkled on the leaping water of the brook, or rested on a leaf that stood out, shimmering and distinct, on the monotonous background of sombre green tints. The clear gap of blue above his head was crossed by the quick flight of white rice-birds whose wings flashed in the sunlight, while through it the heat poured down from the sky, clung about the steaming earth, rolled among the trees, and wrapped up Willems in the soft and odorous folds of air heavy with the faint scent of blossoms and with the acrid smell of decaying life. And in that atmosphere of Nature's workshop Willems felt soothed and lulled into forgetfulness of his past, into indifference as to his future. The recollections of his triumphs, of his wrongs and of his ambition vanished in that warmth, which seemed to melt all regrets, all hope, all anger, all strength out of his heart. And he lay there, dreamily contented in the tepid and perfumed shelter, thinking of Aïssa's eyes; recalling the sound of her voice, the quiver of her lips—her frowns and her smile.

She came, of course. To her he was something new, unknown and strange. He was bigger, stronger than any man she had seen before, and altogether different from all those she knew. He was of the victorious race. With a vivid remembrance of the great catastrophe of her life he appeared to her with all the fascination of a great and dangerous thing; of a terror vanquished, surmounted, made a plaything of. They spoke with just such a deep voice—those victorious men; they looked with just such hard blue eyes at their enemies. And she made that voice speak softly to her, those eyes look tenderly at her face! He was indeed a man. She could not understand all he told her of his life, but the fragments she understood she made up for herself into a story of a man great amongst his own people, valorous and unfortunate; an undaunted fugitive dreaming of vengeance against his enemies. He had all the attractiveness of the vague and the unknown—of the unforeseen and of the sudden; of a being strong, dangerous, alive, and human, ready to be enslaved.

She felt that he was ready. She felt it with the unerring intuition of a primitive woman confronted by a simple impulse. Day after day, when they met and she stood a little way off, listening to his words, holding him with her look, the undefined terror of the new conquest became faint and blurred like the memory of a dream, and the certitude grew distinct, and convincing, and visible to the eyes like some material thing in full sunlight. It was a deep joy, a great pride, a tangible sweetness that seemed to

leave the taste of honey on her lips. He lay stretched at her feet without moving, for he knew from experience how a slight movement of his could frighten her away in the first days of their intercourse. He lay very quiet, with all the ardour of his desire ringing in his voice and shining in his eyes, whilst his body was still, like death itself. And he looked at her, standing above him, her head lost in the shadow of broad and graceful leaves that touched her cheek; while the slender spikes of pale green orchids streamed down from amongst the boughs and mingled with the black hair that framed her face, as if all those plants claimed her for their own—the animated and brilliant flower of all that exuberant life which, born in gloom, struggles for ever towards the sunshine.

Every day she came a little nearer. He watched her slow progress—the gradual taming of that woman by the words of his love. It was the monotonous song of praise and desire that, commencing at creation, wraps up the world like an atmosphere and shall end only in the end of all things—when there are no lips to sing and no ears to hear. He told her that she was beautiful and desirable, and he repeated it again and again; for when he told her that, he had said all there was within him—he had expressed his only thought, his only feeling. And he watched the startled look of wonder and mistrust vanish from her face with the passing days, her eyes soften, the smile dwell longer and longer on her lips; a smile as of one charmed by a delightful dream; with the slight exaltation of intoxicating triumph lurking in its dawning tenderness.

And while she was near there was nothing in the whole world—for that idle man—but her look and her smile. Nothing in the past, nothing in the future; and in the present only the luminous fact of her existence. But in the sudden darkness of her going he would be left weak and helpless, as though despoiled violently of all that was himself. He who had lived all his life with no preoccupation but that of his own career, contemptuously indifferent to all feminine influence, full of scorn for men that would submit to it, if ever so little; he, so strong, so superior even in his errors, realized at last that his very individuality was snatched from within himself by the hand of a woman. Where was the assurance and pride of his cleverness; the belief in success, the anger of failure, the wish to retrieve his fortune, the certitude of his ability to accomplish it yet? Gone. All gone. All that had been a man within him was gone, and there remained only the trouble of his heart—that heart which had become a contemptible thing; which could be fluttered by a look or a smile, tormented by a word, soothed by a promise.

When the longed-for day came at last, when she sank on the grass by his side and with a quick gesture took his hand in hers, he sat up suddenly with the movement and look of a man awakened by the crash of his own falling house. All his blood, all his sensation, all his life seemed to rush into that hand leaving him without strength, in a cold shiver, in the sudden clamminess and collapse as of a deadly gun-shot wound. He flung her hand away brutally, like something burning, and sat motionless, his head fallen forward, staring on the ground and catching his breath in painful gasps. His impulse of fear and apparent horror did not dismay her in the least. Her face was grave and her eyes looked seriously at him. Her fingers touched the hair of his temple, ran in a light caress down his cheek, twisted gently the end of his long moustache; and while he sat in the tremor of that contact she ran off with startling fleetness and disappeared in a peal of clear laughter, in the stir of grass, in the nod of young twigs growing over the path; leaving behind only a vanishing trail of motion and sound.

He scrambled to his feet slowly and painfully, like a man with a burden on his shoulders, and walked towards the riverside. He hugged to his breast the recollection of his fear and of his delight, but told himself seriously over and over again that this must be the end of that adventure. After shoving off his canoe into the stream he lifted his eyes to the bank and gazed at it long and steadily, as if taking his last look at a place of charming memories. He marched up to Almayer's house with the concentrated expression and the determined step of a man who had just taken a momentous resolution. His face was set and rigid, his gestures and movements were guarded and slow. He was keeping a tight hand on himself. A very tight hand. He had a vivid illusion—as vivid as reality almost—of being in charge of a slippery prisoner. He sat opposite Almayer during that dinner—which was their last meal together—with a perfectly calm face and within him a growing terror of escape from his own self. Now and then he would grasp the edge of the table and set his teeth hard in a sudden wave of acute despair, like one who, falling down a smooth and rapid declivity that ends in a precipice, digs his finger nails into the yielding surface and feels himself slipping helplessly to inevitable destruction.

Then, abruptly, came a relaxation of his muscles, the giving way of his will. Something seemed to snap in his head, and that wish, that idea kept back during all those hours, darted into his brain with the heat and noise of a conflagration. He must see her! See her at once! Go now! To-night! He had the raging regret of the lost hour, of every passing moment. There was no

thought of resistance now. Yet with the instinctive fear of the irrevocable, with the innate falseness of the human heart, he wanted to keep open the way of retreat. He had never absented himself during the night. What did Almayer know? What would Almayer think? Better ask him for the gun. A moonlight night. . . . Look for deer. . . . A colourable pretext. He would lie to Almayer. What did it matter! He lied to himself every minute of his life. And for what? For a woman. And such . . .

Almayer's answer showed him that deception was useless. Everything gets to be known, even in this place. Well, he did not care. Cared for nothing but for the lost seconds. What if he should suddenly die. Die before he saw her. Before he could . .

As, with the sound of Almayer's laughter in his ears, he urged his canoe in a slanting course across the rapid current, he tried to tell himself that he could return at any moment. He would just go and look at the place where they used to meet, at the tree under which he lay when she took his hand, at the spot where she sat by his side. Just go there and then return—nothing more; but when his little skiff touched the bank he leaped out, forgetting the painter, and the canoe hung for a moment amongst the bushes and then swung out of sight before he had time to dash into the water and secure it. He was thunderstruck at first. Now he could not go back unless he called up the Rajah's people to get a boat and rowers—and the way to Patalolo's campong led past Aïssa's house!

He went up the path with the eager eyes and reluctant steps of a man pursuing a phantom, and when he found himself at a place where a narrow track branched off to the left towards Omar's clearing he stood still, with a look of strained attention on his face as if listening to a far-off voice—the voice of his fate. It was a sound inarticulate but full of meaning; and following it there came a rending and tearing within his breast. He twisted his fingers together, and the joints of his hands and arms cracked. On his forehead the perspiration stood out in small pearly drops. He looked round wildly. Above the shapeless darkness of the forest undergrowth rose the treetops with their high boughs and leaves standing out black on the pale sky—like fragments of night floating on moonbeams. Under his feet warm steam rose from the heated earth. Round him there was a great silence.

He was looking round for help. This silence, this immobility of his surroundings seemed to him a cold rebuke, a stern refusal, a cruel unconcern. There was no safety outside of himself—and in himself there was no refuge; there was only the image of that woman. He had a sudden moment of lucidity—of that cruel lucidity that comes once in life to the most benighted. He seemed

to see what went on within him, and was horrified at the strange sight. He, a white man whose worst fault till then had been a little want of judgment and too much confidence in the rectitude of his kind! That woman was a complete savage, and . . . He tried to tell himself that the thing was of no consequence. It was a vain effort. The novelty of the sensations he had never experienced before in the slightest degree, yet had despised on hearsay from his safe position of a civilized man, destroyed his courage. He was disappointed with himself. He seemed to be surrendering to a wild creature the unstained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilization. He had a notion of being lost amongst shapeless things that were dangerous and ghastly. He struggled with the sense of certain defeat—lost his footing—fell back into the darkness. With a faint cry and an upward throw of his arms he gave up as a tired swimmer gives up: because the swamped craft is gone from under his feet; because the night is dark and the shore is far—because death is better than strife.

PART TWO

8

THE light and heat fell upon the 'settlement, the clearings, and the river as if flung down by an angry hand. The hand lay silent, still, and brilliant under the avalanche of burning rays that had destroyed all sound and all motion, had buried all shadows, had choked every breath. No living thing dared to affront the serenity of this cloudless sky, dared to revolt against the oppression of this glorious and cruel sunshine. Strength and resolution, body and mind alike were helpless, and tried to hide before the rush of the fire from heaven. Only the frail butterflies, the fearless children of the sun, the capricious tyrants of the flowers, fluttered audaciously in the open, and their minute shadows hovered in swarms over the drooping blossoms, ran lightly on the withering grass, or glided on the dry and cracked earth. No voice was heard in this hot noontide but the faint murmur of the river that hurried on in swirls and eddies, its sparkling wavelets chasing each other in their joyous course to the sheltering depths, to the cool refuge of the sea.

Almayer had dismissed his workmen for the midday rest, and, his little daughter on his shoulder, ran quickly across the courtyard, making for the shade of the verandah of his house. He laid the sleepy child on the seat of the big rocking-chair, on a pillow which he took out of his own hammock, and stood for a while looking down at her with tender and pensive eyes. The child, tired and hot, moved uneasily, sighed, and looked up at him with the veiled look of sleepy fatigue. He picked up from the floor a broken palm-leaf fan, and began fanning gently the flushed little face. Her eyelids fluttered and Almayer smiled. A responsive smile brightened for a second her heavy eyes, broke with a dimple the soft outline of her cheek; then the eyelids dropped suddenly, she drew a long breath through the parted lips—and was in a deep sleep before the fleeting smile could vanish from her face.

Almayer moved lightly off, took one of the wooden armchairs, and placing it close to the balustrade of the verandah sat down with a sigh of relief. He spread his elbows on the top rail and resting his chin on his clasped hands looked absently at the river, at the dance of sunlight on the flowing water. Gradually the forest of the further bank became smaller, as if sinking below the

level of the river. The outlines wavered, grew thin, dissolved in the air. Before his eyes there was now only a space of undulating blue—one big, empty sky growing dark at times . . . Where was the sunshine? . . . He felt soothed and happy, as if some gentle and invisible hand had removed from his soul the burden of his body. In another second he seemed to float out into a cool brightness where there was no such thing as memory or pain. Delicious. His eyes closed—opened—closed again.

“Almayer!”

With a sudden jerk of his whole body he sat up, grasping the front rail with both his hands, and blinked stupidly.

“What? What’s that?” he muttered, looking round vaguely.

“Here! Down here, Almayer.”

Half rising in his chair, Almayer looked over the rail at the foot of the verandah, and fell back with a low whistle of astonishment. “A ghost, by heavens!” he exclaimed softly to himself.

“Will you listen to me?” went on the husky voice from the courtyard. “May I come up, Almayer?”

Almayer stood up and leaned over the rail.

“Don’t you dare,” he said, in a voice subdued but distinct. “Don’t you dare! The child sleeps here. And I don’t want to hear you—or speak to you either.”

“You must listen to me! It’s something important.”

“Not to me, surely.”

“Yes! To you. Very important.”

“You were always a humbug,” said Almayer, after a short silence, in an indulgent tone. “Always! I remember the old days. Some fellows used to say there was no one like you for smartness—but you never took me in. Not quite. I never quite believed in you, Mr. Willems.”

“I admit your superior intelligence,” retorted Willems, with scornful impatience, from below. “Listening to me would be a further proof of it. You will be sorry, if you don’t.”

“Oh, you funny fellow!” said Almayer, banteringly. “Well, come up. Don’t make a noise, but come up. You’ll catch a sunstroke down there and die on my doorstep perhaps. I don’t want any tragedy here. Come on!”

Before he finished speaking Willems’ head appeared above the level of the floor, then his shoulders rose gradually and he stood at last before Almayer—a masquerading spectre of the once so very confidential clerk of the richest merchant in the islands. His jacket was soiled and torn; below the waist he was clothed in a worn-out and faded sarong. He flung off his hat, uncovering his long, tangled hair that stuck in wisps on his perspiring forehead and straggled over his eyes, which glittered deep down in the

sockets like the last sparks amongst the black embers of a burnt-out fire. An unclean beard grew out of the caverns of his sunburnt cheeks. The hand he put out towards Almayer was very unsteady. The once firm mouth had the tell-tale droop of mental suffering and physical exhaustion. He was barefooted. Almayer surveyed him with leisurely composure.

"Well!" he said at last, without taking the extended hand which dropped slowly along Willems' body.

"I am come," began Willems.

"So I see," interrupted Almayer. "You might have spared me this treat without making me unhappy. You have been away five weeks, if I am not mistaken. I got on very well without you—and now you are here you are not pretty to look at."

"Let me speak, will you!" exclaimed Willems.

"Don't shout like this. Do you think yourself in the forest with your . . . your friends? This is a civilized man's house. A white man's. Understand?"

"I am come," began Willems again; "I am come for your good and mine."

"You look as if you had come for a good feed," chimed in the irrepressible Almayer, while Willems waved his hand in a discouraged gesture. "Don't they give you enough to eat," went on Almayer, in a tone of easy banter, "those—what am I to call them—those new relations of yours? That old blind scoundrel must be delighted with your company. You know, he was the greatest thief and murderer of those seas. Say! do you exchange confidences? Tell me, Willems, did you kill somebody in Macassar or did you only steal something?"

"It is not true!" exclaimed Willems, hotly. "I only borrowed. . . . They all lied! I . . ."

"Sh-sh!" hissed Almayer, warningly, with a look at the sleeping child. "So you did steal," he went on, with repressed exultation. "I thought there was something of the kind. And now, here, you steal again."

For the first time Willems raised his eyes to Almayer's face.

"Oh, I don't mean from me. I haven't missed anything," said Almayer, with mocking haste. "But that girl. Hey! you stole her. You did not pay the old fellow. She is no good to him now, is she?"

"Stop that, Almayer!"

Something in Willems' tone caused Almayer to pause. He looked narrowly at the man before him, and could not help being shocked at his appearance.

"Almayer," went on Willems, "listen to me. If you are a human being you will. I suffer horribly—and for your sake."

Almayer lifted his eyebrows. "Indeed! How? But you are raving," he added, negligently.

"Ah! You don't know" whispered Willems. "She is gone. Gone," he repeated, with tears in his voice, "gone two days ago."

"No!" exclaimed the surprised Almayer. "Gone! I haven't heard that news yet." He burst into a subdued laugh. "How funny! Had enough of you already? You know it's not flattering for you, my superior countryman."

Willems—as if not hearing him—leaned against one of the columns of the roof and looked over the river. "At first," he whispered, dreamily, "my life was like a vision of heaven—or hell; I didn't know which. Since she went I know what perdition means; what darkness is. I know what it is to be torn to pieces alive. That's how I feel."

"You may come and live with me again," said Almayer, coldly. "After all, Lingard—whom I call my father and respect as such—left you under my care. You pleased yourself by going away. Very good. Now you want to come back. Be it so. I am no friend of yours. I act for Captain Lingard."

"Come back?" repeated Willems, passionately. "Come back to you and abandon her? Do you think I am mad? Without her! Man! what are you made of? To think that she moves, lives, breathes out of my sight. I am jealous of the wind that fans her, of the air she breathes, of the earth that receives the caress of her foot, of the sun that looks at her now while I . . . I haven't seen her for two days—two days."

The intensity of Willems' feeling moved Almayer somewhat, but he affected to yawn elaborately.

"You do bore me," he muttered. "Why don't you go after her instead of coming here?"

"Why indeed?"

"Don't you know where she is? She can't be very far. No native craft has left this river for the last fortnight."

"No! not very far—and I will tell you where she is. She is in Lakamba's camp." And Willems fixed his eyes steadily on Almayer's face.

"Phew! Patalolo never sent to let me know. Strange," said Almayer, thoughtfully. "Are you afraid of that lot?" he added, after a short pause.

"I—afraid!"

"Then is it the care of your dignity which prevents you from following her there, my high-minded friend?" asked Almayer, with mock solicitude. "How noble of you!"

There was a short silence; then Willems said, quietly, "You are a fool. I should like to kick you."

"No fear," answered Almayer, carelessly; "you are too weak for that. You look starved."

"I don't think I have eaten anything for the last two days; perhaps more—I don't remember. It does not matter. I am full of live embers," said Willems, gloomily. "Look!" and he bared an arm covered with fresh scars. "I have been biting myself to forget in that pain the fire that hurts me there!" He struck his breast violently with his fist, reeled under his own blow, fell into a chair that stood near and closed his eyes slowly.

"Disgusting exhibition," said Almayer, loftily. "What could father ever see in you? You are as estimable as a heap of garbage."

"You talk like that! You, who sold your soul for a few guilders," muttered Willems, wearily, without opening his eyes.

"Not so few," said Almayer, with instinctive readiness, and stopped confused for a moment. He recovered himself quickly, however, and went on: "But you—you have thrown yours away for nothing; flung it under the feet of a damned savage woman who has made you already the thing you are, and will kill you very soon, one way or another, with her love or with her hate. You spoke just now about guilders. You meant Lingard's money, I suppose. Well, whatever I have sold, and for whatever price, I never meant you—you of all people—to spoil my bargain. I feel pretty safe though. Even father, even Captain Lingard, would not touch you now with a pair of tongs; not with a ten-foot pole. . . ."

He spoke excitedly, all in one breath, and, ceasing suddenly, glared at Willems and breathed hard through his nose in sulky resentment. Willems looked at him steadily for a moment, then got up. "Almayer," he said resolutely, "I want to become a trader in this place."

Almayer shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes. And you shall set me up. I want a house and trade goods—perhaps a little money. I ask you for it."

"Anything else you want? Perhaps this coat?" and here Almayer unbuttoned his jacket—"or my house—or my boots?"

"After all it's natural," went on Willems, without paying any attention to Almayer—"it's natural that she should expect the advantages which . . . and then I could shut up that old wretch and then . . ."

He paused, his face brightened with the soft light of dreamy enthusiasm, and he turned his eyes upwards. With his gaunt figure and dilapidated appearance he looked like some ascetic dweller in a wilderness, finding the reward of a self-denying life in a vision of dazzling glory. He went on in an impassioned murmur—

"And then I would have her all to myself away from her people—all to myself—under my own influence—to fashion—to mould—to adore—to soften—to . . . Oh! Delight! And then—then go away to some distant place where, far from all she knew, I would be all the world to her! All the world to her!"

His face changed suddenly. His eyes wandered for a while and then became steady all at once.

"I would repay every cent, of course," he said, in a business-like tone, with something of his old assurance, of his old belief in himself, in it. "Every cent. I need not interfere with your business. I shall cut out the small native traders. I have ideas—but never mind that now. And Captain Lingard would approve, I feel sure. After all it's a loan, and I shall be at hand. Safe thing for you."

"Ah! Captain Lingard would approve! He would app . . ." Almayer choked. The notion of Lingard doing something for Willems enraged him. His face was purple. He spluttered insulting words. Willems looked at him coolly.

"I assure you, Almayer," he said, gently, "that I have good grounds for my demand."

"Your cursed impudence!"

"Believe me, Almayer, your position here is not so safe as you think. An unscrupulous rival here would destroy your trade in a year. It would be ruin. Now Lingard's long absence gives courage to certain individuals. You know?—I have heard much lately. They made proposals to me . . . You are very much alone here. Even Patalolo . . ."

"Damn Patalolo! I am master in this place."

"But, Almayer, don't you see . . ."

"Yes, I see. I see a mysterious ass," interrupted Almayer, violently. "What is the meaning of your veiled threats? Don't you think I know something also? They have been intriguing for years—and nothing has happened. The Arabs have been hanging about outside this river for years—and I am still the only trader here; the master here. Do you bring me a declaration of war? Then it's from yourself only. I know all my other enemies. I ought to knock you on the head. You are not worth powder and shot though. You ought to be destroyed with a stick—like a snake."

Almayer's voice woke up the little girl, who sat up on the pillow with a sharp cry. He rushed over to the chair, caught up the child in his arms, walked back blindly, stumbled against Willems' hat which lay on the floor, and kicked it furiously down the steps.

"Clear out of this! Clear out!" he shouted.

Willems made an attempt to speak, but Almayer howled him down.

"Take yourself off! Don't you see you frighten the child—you scarecrow! No! no! dear," he went on to his little daughter, soothingly, while Willems walked down the steps slowly. "No. Don't cry. See! Bad man going away. Look! He is afraid of your papa. Nasty bad man. Never come back again. He shall live in the woods and never come near my little girl. If he comes papa will kill him—so!" He struck his fist on the rail of the balustrade to show how he would kill Willems, and, perching the consoled child on his shoulder held her with one hand, while he pointed toward the retreating figure of his visitor.

"Look how he runs away, dearest," he said, coaxingly. "Isn't he funny. Call 'pig' after him, dearest. Call after him."

The seriousness of her face vanished into dimples. Under the long eyelashes, glistening with recent tears, her big eyes sparkled and danced with fun. She took firm hold of Almayer's hair with one hand, while she waved the other joyously and called out with all her might, in a clear note, soft and distinct like the pipe of a bird:—

"Pig! Pig! Pig!"

9

A SIGH under the flaming blue, a shiver of the sleeping sea, a cool breath as if a door had been swung upon the frozen spaces of the universe, and with a stir of leaves, with the nod of boughs, with the tremble of slender branches the sea breeze struck the coast, rushed up the river, swept round the broad reaches, and travelled on in a soft ripple of darkening water, in the whisper of branches, in the rustle of leaves of the awakened forests. It fanned in Lakamba's campong the dull red of expiring embers into a pale brilliance; and, under its touch, the slender, upright spirals of smoke that rose from every glowing heap swayed, wavered, and eddying down filled the twilight of clustered shade trees with the aromatic scent of the burning wood. The men who had been dozing in the shade during the hot hours of the afternoon woke up, and the silence of the big courtyard was broken by the hesitating murmur of yet sleepy voices, by coughs and yawns, with now and then a burst of laughter, a loud hail, a name or joke sent out in a soft drawl. Small groups squatted round the little fires, and the monotonous undertone of talk filled the enclosure; the talk of barbarians, persistent, steady, repeating itself in the soft syllables, in musical tones of the never-ending discourses of

those men of the forests and the sea, who can talk most of the day and all the night; who never exhaust a subject, never seem able to thresh a matter out; to whom that talk is poetry and painting and music, all art, all history; their only accomplishment, their only superiority, their only amusement. The talk of camp fires, which speaks of bravery and cunning, of strange events and of far countries, of the news of yesterday and the news of to-morrow. The talk about the dead and the living—about those who fought and those who loved.

Lakamba came out on the platform before his own house and sat down—perspiring, half asleep, and sulky—in a wooden arm-chair under the shade of the overhanging eaves. Through the darkness of the doorway he could hear the soft warbling of his womenkind, busy round the looms where they were weaving the checkered pattern of his gala sarongs. Right and left of him on the flexible bamboo floor those of his followers to whom their distinguished birth, long devotion, or faithful service had given the privilege of using the chief's house, were sleeping on mats or just sat up rubbing their eyes: while the more wakeful had mustered enough energy to draw a chessboard with red clay on a fine mat and were now meditating silently over their moves. Above the prostrate forms of the players, who lay face downward supported on elbow, the soles of their feet waving irresolutely about, in the absorbed meditation of the game, there towered here and there the straight figure of an attentive spectator looking down with dispassionate but profound interest. On the edge of the platform a row of high-heeled leather sandals stood ranged carefully in a level line, and against the rough wooden rail leaned the slender shafts of the spears belonging to these gentlemen, the broad blades of dulled steel looking very black in the reddening light of approaching sunset.

A boy of about twelve—the personal attendant of Lakamba—squatted at his master's feet and held up towards him a silver siri box. Slowly Lakamba took the box, opened it, and tearing off a piece of green leaf deposited in it a pinch of lime, a morsel of gambier, a small bit of areca nut, and wrapped up the whole with a dexterous twist. He paused, morsel in hand, seemed to miss something, turned his head from side to side, slowly, like a man with a stiff neck, and ejaculated in an ill-humoured bass—
“Babalatchi!”

The players glanced up quickly, and looked down again directly. Those men who were standing stirred uneasily as if prodded by the sound of the chief's voice. The one nearest to Lakamba repeated the call, after a while, over the rail into the courtyard. There was a movement of upturned faces below by

the fires, and the cry trailed over the enclosure in sing-song tones. The thumping of wooden pestles husking the evening rice stopped for a moment and Babalatchi's name rang afresh shrilly on women's lips in various keys. A voice far off shouted something—another, nearer, repeated it; there was a short hubbub which died out with extreme suddenness. The first crier turned to Lakamba, saying indolently—

“He is with the blind Omar.”

Lakamba's lips moved inaudibly. The man who had just spoken was again deeply absorbed in the game going on at his feet; and the chief—as if he had forgotten all about it already—sat with a stolid face amongst his silent followers, leaning back squarely in his chair, his hands on the arms of his seat, his knees apart, his big blood-shot eyes blinking solemnly, as if dazzled by the noble vacuity of his thoughts.

Babalatchi had gone to see old Omar late in the afternoon. The delicate manipulation of the ancient pirate's susceptibilities, the skilful management of Aïssa's violent impulses engrossed him to the exclusion of every other business—interfered with his regular attendance upon his chief and protector—even disturbed his sleep for the last three nights. That day when he left his own bamboo hut—which stood amongst others in Lakamba's campong—his heart was heavy with anxiety and with doubts as to the success of his intrigue. He walked slowly, with his usual air of detachment from his surroundings, as if unaware that many sleepy eyes watched from all parts of the courtyard his progress towards a small gate at its upper end. That gate gave access to a separate enclosure in which a rather large house, built of planks, had been prepared by Lakamba's orders for the reception of Omar and Aïssa. It was a superior kind of habitation which Lakamba intended for the dwelling of his chief adviser—whose abilities were worth that honour, he thought. But after the consultation in the deserted clearing—when Babalatchi had disclosed his plan—they both had agreed that the new house should be used at first to shelter Omar and Aïssa after they had been persuaded to leave the Rajah's place, or had been kidnapped from there—as the case might be. Babalatchi did not mind in the least the putting off of his own occupation of the house of honour, because it had many advantages for the quiet working out of his plans. It had a certain seclusion, having an enclosure of its own, and that enclosure communicated also with Lakamba's private courtyard at the back of his residence—a place set apart for the female household of the chief. The only communication with the river was through the great front courtyard always full of armed men and watchful eyes. Behind the whole group of build-

ings there stretched the level ground of rice-clearings, which in their turn were closed in by the wall of untouched forests with undergrowth so thick and tangled that nothing but a bullet—and that fired at pretty close range—could penetrate any distance there.

Babalatchi slipped quietly through the little gate and, closing it, tied up carefully the rattan fastenings. Before the house there was a square space of ground, beaten hard into the level smoothness of asphalt. A big buttressed tree, a giant left there on purpose during the process of clearing the land, roofed in the clear space with a high canopy of gnarled boughs and thick, sombre leaves. To the right—and some small distance away from the large house—a little hut of reeds, covered with mats, had been put up for the special convenience of Omar, who, being blind and infirm, had some difficulty in ascending the steep plankway that led to the more substantial dwelling, which was built on low posts and had an uncovered verandah. Close by the trunk of the tree, and facing the doorway of the hut, the household fire glowed in a small handful of embers in the midst of a large circle of white ashes. An old woman—some humble relation of one of Lakamba's wives, who had been ordered to attend on Aissa—was squatting over the fire and lifted up her bleared eyes to gaze at Babalatchi in an uninterested manner, as he advanced rapidly across the courtyard.

Babalatchi took in the courtyard with a keen glance of his solitary eye, and without looking down at the old woman muttered a question. Silently, the woman stretched a tremulous and emaciated arm towards the hut. Babalatchi made a few steps towards the doorway, but stopped outside in the sunlight.

"O! Tuan Omar, Omar besar! It is I—Babalatchi!"

Within the hut there was a feeble groan, a fit of coughing and an indistinct murmur in the broken tones of a vague plaint. Encouraged evidently by those signs of dismal life within, Babalatchi entered the hut, and after some time came out leading with rigid carefulness the blind Omar, who followed with both his hands on his guide's shoulders. There was a rude seat under the tree, and there Babalatchi led his old chief, who sat down with a sigh of relief and leaned wearily against the rugged trunk. The rays of the setting sun, darting under the spreading branches, rested on the white-robed figure sitting with head thrown back in stiff dignity, on the thin hands moving uneasily, and on the stolid face with its eyelids dropped over the destroyed eyeballs; a face set into the immobility of a plaster cast yellowed by age.

"Is the sun near its setting?" asked Omar, in a dull voice.

"Very near," answered Babalatchi.

"Where am I? Why have I been taken away from the place which I knew—where I, blind, could move without fear? It is like black night to those who see. And the sun is near its setting—and I have not heard the sound of her footsteps since the morning! Twice a strange hand has given me my food to-day. Why? Why? Where is she?"

"She is near," said Babalatchi.

"And he?" went on Omar, with sudden eagerness, and a drop in his voice. "Where is he? Not here. Not here!" he repeated, turning his head from side to side as if in deliberate attempt to see.

"No! He is not here now," said Babalatchi, soothingly. Then, after a pause, he added very low, "But he shall soon return."

"Return! O crafty one! Will he return? I have cursed him three times," exclaimed Omar, with weak violence.

"He is—no doubt—accursed," assented Babalatchi, in a conciliating manner—"and yet he will be here before very long—I know."

"You are crafty and faithless. I have made you great. You were dirt under my feet—less than dirt," said Omar, with tremulous energy.

"I have fought by your side many times," said Babalatchi, calmly.

"Why did he come?" went on Omar. "Did you send him? Why did he come to defile the air I breathe—to mock at my fate—to poison her mind and steal her body? She has grown hard of heart to me. Hard and merciless and stealthy like rocks that tear a ship's life out under the smooth sea." He drew a long breath, struggled with his anger, then broke down suddenly. "I have been hungry," he continued, in a whimpering tone—"often I have been very hungry—and cold—and neglected—and nobody near me. She had often forgotten me—and my sons are dead, and that man is an infidel and a dog. Why did he come? Did you show him the way?"

"He found the way himself, O Leader of the brave," said Babalatchi, sadly. "I only saw a way for their destruction and our own greatness. And if I saw aright, then you shall never suffer from hunger any more. There shall be peace for us, and glory and riches."

"And I shall die to-morrow," murmured Omar, bitterly.

"Who knows? Those things have been written since the beginning of the world," whispered Babalatchi, thoughtfully.

"Do not let him come back," exclaimed Omar.

"Neither can he escape his fate," went on Babalatchi. "He shall come back, and the power of men we always hated, you and I, shall crumble into dust in our hand." Then he added with

enthusiasm, "They shall fight amongst themselves and perish both."

"And you shall see all this, while, I . . ."

"True," murmured Babalatchi, regretfully. "To you life is darkness."

"No! Flame!" exclaimed the old Arab, half-rising, then falling back in his seat. "The flame of the last day! I see it yet—the last thing I saw! And I hear the noise of the rent earth—when they all died. And I live to the the plaything of a crafty one," he added, with inconsequential peevishness.

"You are my master still," said Babalatchi, humbly. "You are very wise—and in your wisdom you shall speak to Syed Abdulla when he comes here—you shall speak to him as I advised, I, your servant, the man who fought at your right hand for many years. I have heard by a messenger that the Syed Abdulla is coming to-night, perhaps late; for those things must be done secretly, lest the white man, the trader up the river, should know of them. But he will be here. There has been a surat delivered to Lakamba. In it, Syed Abdulla says he will leave his ship, which is anchored outside the river, at the hour of noon to-day. He will be here before daylight if Allah wills."

He spoke with his eye fixed on the ground, and did not become aware of Aïssa's presence till he lifted his head when he ceased speaking. She had approached so quietly that even Omar did not hear her footsteps, and she stood now looking at them with troubled eyes and parted lips, as if she was going to speak; but at Babalatchi's entreating gesture she remained silent. Omar sat absorbed in thought.

"Ay wa! Even so!" he said at last, in a weak voice. "I am to speak your wisdom, O Babalatchi! Tell him to trust the white man! I do not understand, I am old and blind and weak. I do not understand. I am very cold," he continued, in a lower tone, moving his shoulders uneasily. He ceased, then went on rambling in a faint whisper. "They are the sons of witches, and their father is Satan the stoned. Sons of witches. Sons of witches." After a short silence he asked suddenly, in a firmer voice—"How many white men are there here, O crafty one?"

"There are two here. Two white men to fight one another," answered Babalatchi, with alacrity.

"And how many will be left then? How many? Tell me, you who are wise."

"The downfall of an enemy is the consolation of the unfortunate," said Babalatchi, sententiously. "They are on every sea; only the wisdom of the Most High knows their number—but you shall know that some of them suffer."

"Tell me, Babalatchi, will they die? Will they both die?" asked Omar, in sudden agitation.

Aïssa made a movement. Babalatchi held up a warning hand.

"They shall, surely, die," he said steadily, looking at the girl with unflinching eye.

"Ay wa! But die soon! So that I can pass my hand over their faces when Allah has made them stiff."

"If such is their fate and yours," answered Babalatchi, without hesitation. "God is great!"

A violent fit of coughing doubled Omar up, and he rocked himself to and fro, wheezing and moaning in turns, while Babalatchi and the girl looked at him in silence. Then he leaned back against the tree, exhausted.

"I am alone, I am alone," he wailed feebly, groping vaguely about with his trembling hands. "Is there anybody near me? Is there anybody? I am afraid of this strange place."

"I am by your side, O Leader of the brave," said Babalatchi, touching his shoulder lightly. "Always by your side as in the days when we both were young: as in the time when we both went with arms in our hands."

"Has there been such a time, Babalatchi?" said Omar, wildly; "I have forgotten. And now when I die there will be no man, no fearless man to speak of his father's bravery. There was a woman! A woman! And she has forsaken me for an infidel dog. The hand of the Compassionate is heavy on my head! Oh, my calamity! Oh, my shame!"

He calmed down after a while, and asked quietly—"Is the sun set, Babalatchi?"

"It is now as low as the highest tree I can see from here," answered Babalatchi.

"It is the time of prayer," said Omar, attempting to get up.

Dutifully Babalatchi helped his old chief to rise, and they walked slowly towards the hut. Omar waited outside, while Babalatchi went in and came out directly, dragging after him the old Arab's praying carpet. Out of a brass vessel he poured the water of ablution on Omar's outstretched hands, and eased him carefully down into a kneeling posture, for the venerable robber was far too infirm to be able to stand. Then as Omar droned out the first words and made his first bow towards the Holy City, Babalatchi stepped noiselessly towards Aïssa, who did not move all the time.

Aïssa looked steadily at the one-eyed sage, who was approaching her slowly and with a great show of deference. For a moment they stood facing each other in silence. Babalatchi appeared embarrassed. With a sudden and quick gesture she caught hold of

his arm, and with the other hand pointed towards the sinking red disc that glowed, rayless, through the floating mists of the evening.

"The third sunset! The last! And he is not here," she whispered; "what have you done, man without faith? What have you done?"

"Indeed I have kept my word," murmured Babalatchi, earnestly. "This morning Bulangi went with a canoe to look for him. He is a strange man, but our friend, and shall keep close to him and watch him without ostentation. And at the third hour of the day I have sent another canoe with four rowers. Indeed, the man you long for, O daughter of Omar! may come when he likes."

"But he is not here! I waited for him yesterday. To-day! To-morrow I shall go."

"Not alive!" muttered Babalatchi to himself. "And do you doubt your power," he went on in a louder tone—"you that to him are more beautiful than an houri of the seventh Heaven? He is your slave."

"A slave does run away sometimes," she said, gloomily, "and then the master must go and seek him out."

"And do you want to live and die a beggar?" asked Babalatchi, impatiently.

"I care not," she exclaimed, wringing her hands; and the black pupils of her wide-open eyes darted wildly here and there like petrels before the storm.

"Sh! Sh!" hissed Babalatchi, with a glance towards Omar. "Do you think, O girl! that he himself would live like a beggar, even with you?"

"He is great," she said, ardently. "He despises you all! He despises you all! He is indeed a man!"

"You know that best," muttered Babalatchi, with a fugitive smile—"but remember, woman with the strong heart, that to hold him now you must be to him like the great sea to thirsty men—a never-ceasing torment, and a madness."

He ceased and they stood in silence, both looking on the ground, and for a time nothing was heard above the crackling of the fire, but the intoning of Omar glorifying the God—his God, and the Faith—his faith. Then Babalatchi cocked his head on one side and appeared to listen intently to the hum of voices in the big courtyard. The dull noise swelled into distinct shouts, then into a great tumult of voices, dying away, recommencing, growing louder, to cease again abruptly; and in those short pauses the shrill vociferations of women rushed up, as if released, towards the quiet heaven. Aissa and Babalatchi started, but the latter gripped in his turn the girl's arm and restrained her with a strong grasp.

"Wait," he whispered.

The little door in the heavy stockade which separated Lakamba's private ground from Omar's enclosure swung back quickly, and the noble exile appeared with disturbed mien and a naked short sword in his hand. His turban was half unrolled, and the end trailed on the ground behind him. His jacket was open. He breathed thickly for a moment before he spoke.

"He came in Bulangi's boat," he said, "and walked quietly till he was in my presence, when the senseless fury of white men caused him to rush upon me. I have been in great danger," went on the ambitious nobleman in an aggrieved tone. "Do you hear that, Babalatchi? That eater of swine aimed a blow at my face with his unclean fist. He tried to rush amongst my household. Six men are holding him now."

A fresh outburst of yells stopped Lakamba's discourse. Angry voices shouted: "Hold him. Beat him down. Strike at his head." Then the clamour ceased with sudden completeness, as if strangled by a mighty hand, and after a second of surprising silence the voice of Willems was heard alone, howling maledictions in Malay, in Dutch, and in English.

"Listen," said Lakamba, speaking with unsteady lips, "he blasphemes his God. His speech is like the raving of a mad dog. Can we hold him for ever? He must be killed!"

"Fool!" muttered Babalatchi, looking up at Aïssa, who stood with set teeth, with gleaming eyes and distended nostrils, yet obedient to the touch of his restraining hand. "It is the third day, and I have kept my promise," he said to her, speaking very low. "Remember," he added warningly—"like the sea to the thirsty! And now," he said aloud, releasing her and stepping back, "go, fearless daughter, go!"

Like an arrow, rapid and silent she flew down the enclosure, and disappeared through the gate of the courtyard. Lakamba and Babalatchi looked after her. They heard the renewed tumult, the girl's clear voice calling out, "Let him go!" Then after a pause in the din no longer than half the human breath the name of Aïssa rang in a shout loud, discordant, and piercing, which sent through them an involuntary shudder. Old Omar collapsed on his carpet and moaned feebly; Lakamba stared with gloomy contempt in the direction of the inhuman sound; but Babalatchi, forcing a smile, pushed his distinguished protector through the narrow gate in the stockade, followed him, and closed it quickly.

The old woman, who had been most of the time kneeling by the fire, now rose, glanced round fearfully and crouched hiding behind the tree. The gate of the great courtyard flew open with a great clatter before a frantic kick, and Willems darted in carrying

Aïssa in his arms. He rushed up the enclosure like a tornado, pressing the girl to his breast, her arms round his neck, her head hanging back over his arm, her eyes closed and her long hair nearly touching the ground. They appeared for a second in the glare of the fire, then, with immense strides, he dashed up the planks and disappeared with his burden in the doorway of the big house.

Inside and outside the enclosure there was silence. Omar lay supporting himself on his elbow, his terrified face with its closed eyes giving him the appearance of a man tormented by a nightmare.

"What is it? Help! Help me to rise!" he called out faintly.

The old hag, still crouching in the shadow, stared with bleared eyes at the doorway of the big house, and took no notice of his call. He listened for a while, then his arm gave way, and, with a deep sigh of discouragement, he let himself fall on the carpet.

The boughs of the tree nodded and trembled in the unsteady currents of the light wind. A leaf fluttered down slowly from some high branch and rested on the ground, immobile, as if resting for ever, in the glow of the fire; but soon it stirred, then soared suddenly, and flew, spinning and turning before the breath of the perfumed breeze, driven helplessly into the dark night that had closed over the land.

IO

FOR upwards of forty years Abdulla had walked in the way of his Lord. Son of the rich Syed Selim bin Sali, the great Mohammedan trader of the Straits, he went forth at the age of seventeen on his first commercial expedition, as his father's representative on board a pilgrim ship chartered by the wealthy Arab to convey a crowd of pious Malays to the Holy Shrine. That was in the days when steam was not in those seas—or, at least, not so much as now. The voyage was long, and the young man's eyes were opened to the wonders of many lands. Allah had made it his fate to become a pilgrim very early in life. This was a great favour of Heaven, and it could not have been bestowed upon a man who prized it more, or who made himself more worthy of it by the unswerving piety of his heart and by the religious solemnity of his demeanour. Later on it became clear that the book of his destiny contained the programme of a wandering life. He visited Bombay and Calcutta, looked in at the Persian Gulf, beheld in due course the high and barren coasts of the Gulf of Suez, and this was the limit of his wanderings westward. He was

then twenty-seven, and the writing on his forehead decreed that the time had come for him to return to the Straits and take from his dying father's hands the many threads of a business that was spread over all the Archipelago: from Sumatra to New Guinea, from Batavia to Palawan. Very soon his ability, his will—strong to obstinacy—his wisdom beyond his years, caused him to be recognized as the head of a family whose members and connections were found in every part of those seas. An uncle here—a brother there; a father-in-law in Batavia, another in Palembang; husbands of numerous sisters; cousins innumerable scattered north, south, east, and west—in every place where there was trade: the great family lay like a network over the islands. They lent money to princes, influenced the council-rooms, faced—if need be—with peaceful intrepidity the white rulers who held the land and the sea under the edge of sharp swords; and they all paid great deference to Abdulla, listened to his advice, entered into his plans—because he was wise, pious, and fortunate.

He bore himself with the humility becoming a Believer, who never forgets, even for one moment of his waking life, that he is the servant of the Most High. He was largely charitable because the charitable man is the friend of Allah, and when he walked out of his house—built of stone, just outside the town of Penang—on his way to his godowns in the port, he had often to snatch his hand away sharply from under the lips of men of his race and creed; and often he had to murmur deprecating words, or even to rebuke with severity those who attempted to touch his knees with their finger-tips in gratitude or supplication. He was very handsome, and carried his small head high with meek gravity. His lofty brow, straight nose, narrow, dark face with its chiselled delicacy of feature, gave him an aristocratic appearance which proclaimed his pure descent. His beard was trimmed close and to a rounded point. His large brown eyes looked out steadily with a sweetness that was belied by the expression of his thin-lipped mouth. His aspect was serene. He had a belief in his own prosperity which nothing could shake.

Restless, like all his people, he very seldom dwelt for many days together in his splendid house in Penang. Owner of ships, he was often on board one or another of them, traversing in all directions the field of his operations. In every port he had a household—his own or that of a relation—to hail his advent with demonstrative joy. In every port there were rich and influential men eager to see him, there was business to talk over, there were important letters to read: an immense correspondence, enclosed in silk envelopes—a correspondence which had nothing to do with the infidels of colonial post-offices, but came into his hands

by devious, yet safe, ways. It was left for him by taciturn nakhodas of native trading craft, or was delivered with profound salaams by travel-stained and weary men who would withdraw from his presence calling upon Allah to bless the generous giver of splendid rewards. And the news was always good, and all his attempts always succeeded, and in his ears there rang always a chorus of admiration, of gratitude, of humble entreaties.

A fortunate man. And his felicity was so complete that the good genii, who ordered the stars at his birth, had not neglected—by a refinement of benevolence strange in such primitive beings—to provide him with a desire difficult to attain, and with an enemy hard to overcome. The envy of Lingard's political and commercial successes, and the wish to get the best of him in every way, became Abdulla's mania, the paramount interest of his life, the salt of his existence.

For the last few months he had been receiving mysterious messages from Sambir urging him to decisive action. He had found the river a couple of years ago, and had been anchored more than once off that estuary where the, till then, rapid Pantai, spreading slowly over the lowlands, seems to hesitate, before it flows gently through twenty outlets; over a maze of mudflats, sandbanks and reefs, into the expectant sea. He had never attempted the entrance, however, because men of his race, although brave and adventurous travellers, lack the true seaman-like instincts, and he was afraid of getting wrecked. He could not bear the idea of the Rajah Laut being able to boast that Abdulla bin Selim, like other and lesser men, had also come to grief when trying to wrest his secret from him. Meantime he returned encouraging answers to his unknown friends in Sambir, and waited for his opportunity in the calm certitude of ultimate triumph.

Such was the man whom Lakamba and Babalatchi expected to see for the first time on the night of Willems' return to Aissa. Babalatchi, who had been tormented for three days by the fear of having overreached himself in his little plot, now, feeling sure of his white man, felt lighthearted and happy as he superintended the preparations in the courtyard for Abdulla's reception. Half-way between Lakamba's house and the river a pile of dry wood was made ready for the torch that would set fire to it at the moment of Abdulla's landing. Between this and the house again there was, ranged in a semicircle, a set of low bamboo frames, and on those were piled all the carpets and cushions of Lakamba's household. It had been decided that the reception was to take place in the open air, and that it should be made impressive by the great number of Lakamba's retainers, who, clad in clean white,

with their red sarongs gathered round their waists, chopper at side and lance in hand, were moving about the compound or, gathering into small knots, discussed eagerly the coming ceremony.

Two little fires burned brightly on the water's edge on each side of the landing place. A small heap of damar-gum torches lay by each, and between them Babalatchi strolled backwards and forwards, stopping often with his face to the river and his dead on one side, listening to the sounds that came from the harkness over the water. There was no moon and the night was very clear overhead, but, after the afternoon breeze had expired in fitful puffs, the vapours hung thickening over the glancing surface of the Pantai and clung to the shore, hiding from view the middle of the stream.

A cry in the mist—then another—and, before Babalatchi could answer, two little canoes dashed up to the landing-place, and two of the principal citizens of Sambir, Daoud Sahamin and Hamet Bahassoen, who had been confidentially invited to meet Abdulla, landed quickly and after greeting Babalatchi walked up the dark courtyard towards the house. The little stir caused by their arrival soon subsided, and another silent hour dragged its slow length while Babalatchi tramped up and down between the fires, his face growing more anxious with every passing moment.

At last there was heard a loud hail from down the river. At a call from Babalatchi men ran down to the riverside and, snatching the torches, thrust them into the fires, then waved them above their heads till they burst into a flame. The smoke ascended in thick, wispy streams, and hung in a ruddy cloud above the glare that lit up the courtyard and flashed over the water, showing three long canoes manned by many paddlers lying a little off; the men in them lifting their paddles on high and dipping them down together, in an easy stroke that kept the small flotilla motionless in the strong current, exactly abreast of the landing-place. A man stood up in the largest craft and called out—

“Syed Abdulla bin Selim is here!”

Babalatchi answered aloud in a formal tone—

“Allah gladdens our hearts! Come to the land!”

Abdulla landed first, steadying himself by the help of Babalatchi's extended hand. In the short moment of his passing from the boat to the shore they exchanged sharp glances and a few rapid words.

“Who are you?”

“Babalatchi. The friend of Omar. The protected of Lakamba.”

“You wrote?”

“My words were written, O Giver of alms!”

And then Abdulla walked with composed face between these two lines of men holding torches, and met Lakamba in front of the big fire that was crackling itself up into a great blaze. For a moment they stood with clasped hands invoking peace upon each other's head, then Lakamba, still holding his honoured guest by the hand, led him round the fire to the prepared seats. Babalatchi followed close behind his protector. Abdulla was accompanied by two Arabs. He, like his companions, was dressed in a white robe of starched muslin, which fell in stiff folds straight from the neck. It was buttoned from the throat halfway down with a close row of very small gold buttons; round the tight sleeves there was a narrow braid of gold lace. On his shaven head he wore a small skull-cap of plaited grass. He was shod in patent leather slippers over his naked feet. A rosary of heavy wooden beads hung by a round turn from his right wrist. He sat down slowly in the place of honour, and, dropping his slippers, tucked up his legs under him decorously.

The improvised divan was arranged in a wide semi-circle, of which the point most distant from the fire—some ten yards—was also the nearest to Lakamba's dwelling. As soon as the principal personages were seated, the verandah of the house was filled silently by the muffled-up forms of Lakamba's female belongings. They crowded close to the rail and looked down, whispering faintly. Below, the formal exchange of compliments went on for some time between Lakamba and Abdulla, who sat side by side. Babalatchi squatted humbly at his protector's feet, with nothing but a thin mat between himself and the hard ground.

Then there was a pause. Abdulla glanced round in an expectant manner, and after a while Babalatchi, who had been sitting very still in a pensive attitude, seemed to rouse himself with an effort, and began to speak in gentle and persuasive tones. He described in flowing sentences the first beginnings of Sambir, the dispute of the present ruler, Patalolo, with the Sultan of Koti, the consequent troubles ending with the rising of Bugis settlers under the leadership of Lakamba. At different points of the narrative he would turn for confirmation to Sahamin and Bahassoén, who sat listening eagerly and assented together with a "Betul! Betul! Right! Right!" ejaculated in a fervent undertone.

Warming up with his subject as the narrative proceeded, Babalatchi went on to relate the facts connected with Lingard's action at the critical period of those internal dissensions. He spoke in a restrained voice still, but with a growing energy of indignation. What was he, that man of fierce aspect, to keep all

the world away from them? Was he a government? Who made him ruler? He took possession of Patalolo's mind and made his heart hard; he put severe words into his mouth and caused his hand to strike right and left. That unbeliever kept the Faithful panting under the weight of his senseless oppression. They had to trade with him—accept such goods as he would give—such credit as he would accord. And he exacted payment every year . . .

"Very true!" exclaimed Sahamin and Bahassoen together.

Babalatchi glanced at them approvingly and turned to Abdulla.

"Listen to those men, O Protector of the oppressed!" he exclaimed. "What could we do? A man must trade. There was nobody else."

Sahamin got up, staff in hand, and spoke to Abdulla with ponderous courtesy, emphasizing his words by the solemn flourishes of his right arm.

"It is so. We are weary of paying our debts to that white man here, who is the son of the Rajah Laut. That white man—may the grave of his mother be defiled!—is not content to hold us all in his hand with a cruel grasp. He seeks to cause our very death. He trades with the Dyaks of the forest, who are no better than monkeys. He buys from them guttah and rattans—while we starve. Only two days ago I went to him and said, 'Tuan Almayer'—even so; we must speak politely to that friend of Satan—'Tuan Almayer, I have such and such goods to sell. Will you buy?' And he spoke thus—because those white men have no understanding of any courtesy—he spoke to me as if I was a slave: 'Daoud, you are a lucky man'—remark, O First amongst the Believers! that by those words he could have brought misfortune on my head—'you are a lucky man to have anything in these hard times. Bring your goods quickly, and I shall receive them in payment of what you owe me from last year.' And he laughed, and struck me on the shoulder with his open hand. May Jehannum be his lot!"

"We will fight him," said young Bahassoen, crisply. "We shall fight if there is help and a leader. Tuan Abdulla, will you come among us?"

Abdulla did not answer at once. His lips moved in an inaudible whisper and the beads passed through his fingers with a dry click. All waited in respectful silence. "I shall come if my ship can enter this river," said Abdulla at last, in a solemn tone.

"It can, Tuan," exclaimed Babalatchi. "There is a white man here who . . ."

"I want to see Omar el Badavi and that white man you wrote about," interrupted Abdulla.

Babalatchi got on his feet quickly, and there was a general

move. The women on the verandah hurried indoors, and from the crowd that had kept discreetly in distant parts of the courtyard a couple of men ran with armfuls of dry fuel, which they cast upon the fire. One of them, at a sign from Babalatchi, approached and, after getting his orders, went towards the little gate and entered Omar's enclosure. While waiting for his return, Lakamba, Abdulla, and Babalatchi talked together in low tones. Sahamin sat by himself chewing betel-nut sleepily with a slight and indolent motion of his heavy jaw. Bahassoen, his hand on the hilt of his short sword, strutted backwards and forwards in the full light of the fire, looking very warlike and reckless; the envy and admiration of Lakamba's retainers, who stood in groups or flitted about noiselessly in the shadows of the courtyard.

The messenger who had been sent to Omar came back and stood at a distance, waiting till somebody noticed him. Babalatchi beckoned him close.

"What are his words?" asked Babalatchi.

"He says that Syed Abdulla is welcome now," answered the man.

Lakamba was speaking low to Abdulla, who listened to him with deep interest.

"... We could have eighty men if there was need," he was saying—"eighty men in fourteen canoes. The only thing we want is gunpowder . . ."

"Haï! there will be no fighting," broke in Babalatchi. "The fear of your name will be enough and the terror of your coming."

"There may be powder too," muttered Abdulla with great nonchalance, "if only the ship enters the river safely."

"If the heart is stout the ship will be safe," said Babalatchi. "We will go now and see Omar el Badavi and the white man I have here."

Lakamba's dull eyes became animated suddenly.

"Take care, Tuan Abdulla," he said, "take care. The behaviour of that unclean white madman is furious in the extreme. He offered to strike . . ."

"On my head, you are safe, O Giver of alms!" interrupted Babalatchi.

Abdulla looked from one to the other, and the faintest flicker of a passing smile disturbed for a moment his grave composure. He turned to Babalatchi, and said with decision—

"Let us go."

"This way, O Uplifter of our hearts!" rattled on Babalatchi, with fussy deference. "Only a very few paces and you shall behold Omar the brave, and a white man of great strength and cunning. This way."

He made a sign for Lakamba to remain behind, and with respectful touches on the elbow steered Abdulla towards the gate at the upper end of the courtyard. As they walked on slowly, followed by the two Arabs, he kept on talking in a rapid undertone to the great man, who never looked at him once, although appearing to listen with flattering attention. When near the gate Babalatchi moved forward and stopped, facing Abdulla, with his hands on the fastenings.

"You shall see them both," he said. "All my words about them are true. When I saw him enslaved by the one of whom I spoke, I knew he would be soft in my hand like the mud of the river. At first he answered my talk with bad words of his own language, after the manner of white men. Afterwards, when listening to the voice he loved, he hesitated. He hesitated for many days—too many. I, knowing him well, made Omar withdraw here with his . . . household. Then this red-faced man raged for three days like a black panther that is hungry. And this evening, this very evening, he came. I have him here. He is in the grasp of one with a merciless heart. I have him here," ended Babalatchi, exultingly tapping the upright of the gate with his hand.

"That is good," murmured Abdulla.

"And he shall guide your ship and lead in the fight—if fight there be," went on Babalatchi. "If there is any killing—let him be the slayer. You should give him arms—a short gun that fires many times."

"Yes, by Allah!" assented Abdulla, with slow thoughtfulness.

"And you will have to open your hand, O First amongst the generous!" continued Babalatchi. "You will have to satisfy the rapacity of a white man, and also of one who is not a man, and therefore greedy of ornaments."

"They shall be satisfied," said Abdulla; "but . . ." He hesitated, looking down on the ground and stroking his beard, while Babalatchi waited, anxious, with parted lips. After a short time he spoke again jerkily in an indistinct whisper, so that Babalatchi had to turn his head to catch the words. "Yes. But Omar is the son of my father's uncle . . . and all belonging to him are of the Faith . . . while that man is an unbeliever. It is most unseemly . . . very unseemly. He cannot live under my shadow. Not that dog. Penitence! I take refuge with my God," he mumbled rapidly. "How can he live under my eyes with that woman, who is of the Faith? Scandal! O abomination!"

He finished with a rush and drew a long breath, then added dubiously, "And when that man has done all we want, what is to be done with him?"

They stood close together, meditative and silent, their eyes roaming idly over the courtyard. The big bonfire burned brightly, and a wavering splash of light lay on the dark earth at their feet, while the lazy smoke wreathed itself slowly in gleaming coils amongst the black boughs of the trees. They could see Lakamba, who had returned to his place, sitting hunched up spiritlessly on the cushions, and Sahamin, who had got on his feet again and appeared to be talking to him with dignified animation. Men in twos or threes came out of the shadows into the light, strolling slowly and, passed again into the shadows, their faces turned to each other, their arms moving in restrained gestures. Bahassoen, his head proudly thrown back, his ornaments, embroideries, and sword-hilt flashing in the light, circled steadily round the fire like a planet round the sun. A cool whiff of damp air came from the darkness of the riverside; it made Abdulla and Babalatchi shiver, and woke them up from their abstraction.

"Open the gate and go first," said Abdulla; "there is no danger?"

"On my life, no!" answered Babalatchi, lifting the rattan ring. "He is all peace and content, like a thirsty man who has drunk water after many days."

He swung the gate wide, made a few paces into the gloom of the enclosure, and retraced his steps suddenly.

"He may be made useful in many ways," he whispered to Abdulla, who had stopped short, seeing him come back.

"O Sin! O Temptation!" sighed out Abdulla, faintly. "Our refuge is with the Most High. Can I feed this infidel for ever and for ever?" he added, impatiently.

"No," breathed out Babalatchi. "No! Not for ever. Only while he serves your designs, O Dispenser of Allah's gifts! When the time comes—and your order . . ."

He sidled close to Abdulla and brushed with a delicate touch the hand that hung down listlessly, holding the prayer-beads.

"I am your slave and your offering," he murmured, in a distinct and polite tone, into Abdulla's ear. "When your wisdom speaks, there may be found a little poison that will not lie. Who knows?"

II

BABALATCHI saw Abdulla pass through the low and narrow entrance into the darkness of Omar's hut; heard them exchange the usual greetings and the distinguished visitor's grave voice asking: "There is no misfortune—please God—but

the sight?" and then, becoming aware of the disapproving looks of the two Arabs who had accompanied Abdulla, he followed their example and fell back out of earshot. He did it unwillingly, although he did not ignore that what was going to happen in there was now absolutely beyond his control. He roamed irresolutely about for a while, and at last wandered with careless steps towards the fire, which had been moved, from under the tree, close to the hut and a little to windward of its entrance. He squatted on his heels and began playing pensively with live embers, as was his habit when engrossed in thought, withdrawing his hand sharply and shaking it above his head when he burnt his fingers in a fit of deeper abstraction. Sitting there he could hear the murmur of the talk inside the hut, and he could distinguish the voices but not the words. Abdulla spoke in deep tones, and now and then this flowing monotone was interrupted by a querulous exclamation, a weak moan or a plaintive quaver of the old man. Yes. It was annoying not to be able to make out what they were saying, thought Babalatchi, as he sat gazing fixedly at the unsteady glow of the fire. But it will be right. All will be right. Abdulla inspired him with confidence. He came up fully to his expectation. From the very first moment when he set his eye on him he felt sure that this man—whom he had known by reputation only—was very resolute. Perhaps too resolute. Perhaps he would want to grasp too much later on. A shadow flitted over Babalatchi's face. On the eve of the accomplishment of his desires he felt the bitter taste of that drop of doubt which is mixed with the sweetness of every success.

When, hearing footsteps on the verandah of the big house, he lifted his head, the shadow had passed away and on his face there was an expression of watchful alertness. Willems was coming down the plankway, into the courtyard. The light within trickled through the cracks of the badly joined walls of the house, and in the illuminated doorway appeared the moving form of Aissa. She also passed into the night outside and disappeared from view. Babalatchi wondered where she had got to, and for the moment forgot the approach of Willems. The voice of the white man speaking roughly above his head made him jump to his feet as if impelled upwards by a powerful spring.

"Where's Abdulla?"

Babalatchi waved his hand towards the hut and stood listening intently. The voices within had ceased, then recommenced again. He shot an oblique glance at Willems, whose indistinct form towered above the glow of dying embers.

"Make up this fire," said Willems, abruptly. "I want to see your face."

With obliging alacrity Babalatchi put some dry brushwood on the coals from a handy pile, keeping all the time a watchful eye on Willems. When he straightened himself up his hand wandered almost involuntarily towards his left side to feel the handle of a kriss amongst the folds of his sarong, but he tried to look unconcerned under the angry stare.

"You are in good health, please God?" he murmured.

"Yes!" answered Willems, with an unexpected loudness that caused Babalatchi to start nervously. "Yes! . . . Health! . . . You . . ."

He made a long stride and dropped both his hands on the Malay's shoulders. In the powerful grip Babalatchi swayed to and fro limply, but his face was as peaceful as when he sat—a little while ago—dreaming by the fire. With a final vicious jerk Willems let go suddenly, and turning away on his heel stretched his hands over the fire. Babalatchi stumbled backwards, recovered himself, and wriggled his shoulders laboriously.

"Tse! Tse! Tse!" he clicked, deprecatingly. After a short silence he went on with accentuated admiration: "What a man it is! What a strong man! A man like that"—he concluded, in a tone of meditative wonder—"a man like that could upset mountains—mountains!"

He gazed hopefully for a while at Willems' broad shoulders, and continued, addressing the inimical back, in a low and persuasive voice—

"But why be angry with me? With me who think only of your good? Did I not give her refuge, in my own house? Yes, Tuan! This is my own house. I will let you have it without any recompense because she must have a shelter. Therefore you and she shall live here. Who can know a woman's mind? And such a woman! If she wanted to go away from that other place, who am I—to say no! I am Omar's servant. I said: 'Gladden my heart by taking my house.' Did I say right?"

"I'll tell you something," said Willems, without changing his position; "if she takes a fancy to go away from this place it is you who shall suffer. I will wring your neck."

"When the heart is full of love there is no room in it for justice," recommenced Babalatchi, with unmoved and persistent softness. "Why slay me? You know, Tuan, what she wants. A splendid destiny is her desire—as of all women. You have been wronged and cast out by your people. She knows that. But you are brave, you are strong—you are a man; and, Tuan—I am older than you—you are in her hand. Such is the fate of strong men. And she is of noble birth and cannot live like a slave. You know her—and you are in her hand. You are like a snared bird, because

of your strength. And—remember I am a man that has seen much—submit, Tuan! Submit! . . . Or else . . .”

He drawled out the last words in a hesitating manner and broke off his sentence. Still stretching his hands in turns towards the blaze and without moving his head, Willems gave a short, lugubrious laugh, and asked—

“Or else—what?”

“She may go away again. Who knows?” finished Babalatchi, in a gentle and insinuating tone.

This time Willems spun round sharply. Babalatchi stepped back.

“If she does it will be the worse for you,” said Willems, in a menacing voice. “It will be your doing, and I . . .”

Babalatchi spoke, from beyond the circle of light, with calm disdain.

“Hai—ya! I have heard before. If she goes—then I die. Good! Will that bring her back do you think—Tuan? If it is my doing it shall be well done, O white man! and—who knows—you will have to live without her.”

Willems gasped and started back like a confident wayfarer who, pursuing a path he thinks safe, should see just in time a bottomless chasm under his feet. Babalatchi came into the light and approached Willems sideways, with his head thrown back and a little on one side so as to bring his only eye to bear full on the countenance of the tall white man.

“You threaten me,” said Willems, indistinctly.

“I, Tuan!” exclaimed Babalatchi, with a slight suspicion of irony in the affected surprise of his tone. “I, Tuan? Who spoke of death? Was it I? No! I spoke of life only. Only of life. Of a long life for a lonely man!”

They stood with the fire between them, both silent, both aware, each in his own way, of the importance of the passing minutes. Babalatchi’s fatalism gave him only an insignificant relief in his suspense, because no fatalism can kill the thought of the future, the desire of success, the pain of waiting for the disclosure of the immutable decrees of Heaven. Fatalism is born of the fear of failure, for we all believe that we carry success in our own hands, and we suspect that our hands are weak. Babalatchi looked at Willems and congratulated himself upon his ability to manage that white man. There was a pilot for Abdulla—a victim to appease Lingard’s anger in case of any mishap. He would take good care to put him forward in everything. In any case let the white men fight it out amongst themselves. They were fools. He hated them—the strong fools—and knew that for his righteous wisdom was reserved the safe triumph.

Willems measured dismally the depth of his degradation. He—a white man, the admired of white men, was held by those miserable savages whose tool he was about to become. He felt for them all the hate of his race, of his morality, of his intelligence. He looked upon himself with dismay and pity. She had him. He had heard of such things. He had heard of women who . . . He would never believe such stories. . . . Yet they were true. But his own captivity seemed more complete, terrible, and final—without the hope of any redemption. He wondered at the wickedness of Providence that had made him what he was; that, worse still, permitted such a creature as Almayer to live. He had done his duty by going to him. Why did he not understand? All men were fools. He gave him his chance. The fellow did not see it. It was hard, very hard on himself—Willems. He wanted to take her from amongst her own people. That's why he had condescended to go to Almayer. He examined himself. With a sinking heart he thought that really he could not—somehow—live without her. It was terrible and sweet. He remembered the first days. Her appearance, her face, her smile, her eyes, her words. A savage woman! Yet he perceived that he could think of nothing else but of the three days of their separation, of the few hours since their reunion. Very well. If he could not take her away, then he would go to her. . . . He had, for a moment, a wicked pleasure in the thought that what he had done could not be undone. He had given himself up. He felt proud of it. He was ready to face anything, do anything. He cared for nothing, for nobody. He thought himself very fearless, but as a matter of fact he was only drunk; drunk with the poison of passionate memories.

He stretched his hands over the fire, looked round, and called out—

“Aissa!”

She must have been near, for she appeared at once within the light of the fire. The upper part of her body was wrapped up in the thick folds of a head covering which was pulled down over her brow, and one end of it thrown across from shoulder to shoulder hid the lower part of her face. Only her eyes were visible—sombre and gleaming like a starry night.

Willems, looking at this strange, muffled figure, felt exasperated, amazed and helpless. The ex-confidential clerk of the rich Hudig would hug to his breast settled conceptions of respectable conduct. He sought refuge within his ideas of propriety from the dismal mangroves, from the darkness of the forests and of the heathen souls of the savages that were his masters. She looked like an animated package of cheap cotton goods! It made him furious.

She had disguised herself so because a man of her race was near! He told her not to do it, and she did not obey. Would his ideas ever change so as to agree with her own notions of what was becoming, proper and respectable? He was really afraid they would, in time. It seemed to him awful. She would never change! This manifestation of her sense of proprieties was another sign of their hopeless diversity; something like another step downwards for him. She was too different from him. He was so civilized! It struck him suddenly that they had nothing in common—not a thought, not a feeling; he could not make clear to her the simplest motive of any act of his . . . and he could not live without her.

The courageous man who stood facing Babalatchi gasped unexpectedly with a gasp that was half a groan. This little matter of her veiling herself against his wish acted upon him like a disclosure of some great disaster. It increased his contempt for himself as the slave of a passion he had always derided, as the man unable to assert his will. This will, all his sensations, his personality—all this seemed to be lost in the abominable desire, in the priceless promise of that woman. He was not, of course, able to discern clearly the causes of his misery; but there are none so ignorant as not to know suffering, none so simple as not to feel and suffer from the shock of warring impulses. The ignorant must feel and suffer from their complexity as well as the wisest; but to them the pain of struggle and defeat appears strange, mysterious, remediable and unjust. He stood watching her, watching himself. He tingled with rage from head to foot, as if he had been struck in the face. Suddenly he laughed; but his laugh was like a distorted echo of some insincere mirth very far away.

From the other side of the fire Babalatchi spoke hurriedly—
“Here is Tuan Abdulla.”

12

DIRECTLY on stepping outside Omar's hut Abdulla caught sight of Willems. He expected, of course, to see a white man, but not that white man, whom he knew so well. Everybody who traded in the islands, and who had any dealings with Hudig, knew Willems. For the last two years of his stay in Macassar the confidential clerk had been managing all the local trade of the house under a very slight supervision only on the part of the master. So everybody knew Willems, Abdulla amongst others—

but he was ignorant of Willems' disgrace. As a matter of fact the thing had been kept very quiet—so quiet that a good many people in Macassar were expecting Willems' return there, supposing him to be absent on some confidential mission. Abdulla, in his surprise, hesitated on the threshold. He had prepared himself to see some seaman—some old officer of Lingard's; a common man—perhaps difficult to deal with, but still no match for him. Instead, he saw himself confronted by an individual whose reputation for sagacity in business was well known to him. How did he get here, and why? Abdulla, recovering from his surprise, advanced in a dignified manner towards the fire, keeping his eyes fixed steadily on Willems. When within two paces from Willems he stopped and lifted his right hand in grave salutation. Willems nodded slightly and spoke after a while.

"We know each other, Tuan Abdulla," he said, with an assumption of easy indifference.

"We have traded together," answered Abdulla, solemnly, "but it was far from here."

"And we may trade here also," said Willems.

"The place does not matter. It is the open mind and the true heart that are required in business."

"Very true. My heart is as open as my mind. I will tell you why I am here."

"What need is there? In leaving home one learns life. You travel. Travelling is victory! You shall return with much wisdom."

"I shall never return," interrupted Willems. "I have done with my people. I am a man without brothers. Injustice destroys fidelity."

Abdulla expressed his surprise by elevating his eyebrows. At the same time he made a vague gesture with his arm that could be taken as an equivalent of an approving and conciliating "just so!"

Till then the Arab had not taken any notice of Aissa, who stood by the fire, but now she spoke in the interval of silence following Willems' declaration. In a voice that was much deadened by her wrappings she addressed Abdulla in a few words of greeting, calling him a kinsman. Abdulla glanced at her swiftly for a second, and then, with perfect good breeding, fixed his eyes on the ground. She put out towards him her hand, covered with a corner of her face-veil, and he took it, pressed it twice, and dropping it turned towards Willems. She looked at the two men searchingly, then backed away and seemed to melt suddenly into the night.

"I know what you came for, Tuan Abdulla," said Willems;

"I have been told by that man there." He nodded towards Babalatchi, then went on slowly, "It will be a difficult thing."

"Allah makes everything easy," interjected Babalatchi, piously, from a distance.

The two men turned quickly and stood looking at him thoughtfully, as if in deep consideration of the truth of that proposition. Under their sustained gaze Babalatchi experienced an unwonted feeling of shyness, and dared not approach nearer. At last Willems moved slightly, Abdulla followed readily, and they both walked down the courtyard, their voices dying away in the darkness. Soon they were heard returning, and the voices grew distinct as their forms came out of the gloom.

By the fire they wheeled again, and Babalatchi caught a few words. Willems was saying—

"I have been at sea with him many years when young. I have used my knowledge to observe the way into the river when coming in, this time."

Abdulla assented in general terms.

"In the variety of knowledge there is safety," he said; and then they passed out of earshot.

Babalatchi ran to the tree and took up his position in the solid blackness under its branches, leaning against the trunk. There he was about midway between the fire and the other limit of the two men's walk. They passed him close. Abdulla slim, very straight, his head high, and his hands hanging before him and twisting mechanically the string of beads; Willems tall, broad, looking bigger and stronger in contrast to the slight white figure by the side of which he strolled carelessly, taking one step to the other's two; his big arms in constant motion as he gesticulated vehemently, bending forward to look Abdulla in the face.

They passed and repassed close to Babalatchi some half a dozen times, and, whenever they were between him and the fire, he could see them plain enough. Sometimes they would stop short, Willems speaking emphatically, Abdulla listening with rigid attention, then, when the other had ceased, bending his head slightly as if consenting to some demand, or admitting some statement. Now and then Babalatchi caught a word here and there, a fragment of a sentence, a loud exclamation. Impelled by curiosity he crept to the very edge of the black shadow under the tree. They were nearing him, and he heard Willems say—

"You will pay that money as soon as I come on board. That I must have."

He could not catch Abdulla's reply. When they went past again, Willems was saying—

"My life is in your hand anyway. The boat that brings me

on board your ship shall take the money to Omar. You must have it ready in a sealed bag."

Again they were out of hearing, but instead of coming back they stopped by the fire facing each other. Willems moved his arm, shook his hand on high talking all the time, then brought it down jerkily—stamped his foot. A short period of immobility ensued. Babalatchi, gazing intently, saw Abdulla's lips move almost imperceptibly. Suddenly Willems seized the Arab's passive hand and shook it.

Babalatchi drew the long breath of relieved suspense. The conference was over. All well, apparently.

He ventured now to approach the two men, who saw him and waited in silence. Willems had retired within himself already, and wore a look of grim indifference. Abdulla moved away a step or two. Babalatchi looked at him inquisitively.

"I go now," said Abdulla, "and shall wait for you outside the river, Tuan Willems, till the second sunset. You have only one word, I know."

"Only one word," repeated Willems.

Abdulla and Babalatchi walked together down the enclosure, leaving the white man alone by the fire. The two Arabs who had come with Abdulla preceded them and passed at once through the little gate into the light and the murmur of voices of the principal courtyard, but Babalatchi and Abdulla stopped on this side of it. Abdulla said—

"It is well. We have spoken of many things. He consents."

"When?" asked Babalatchi, eagerly.

"On the second day from this. I have promised everything. I mean to keep much."

"Your hand is always open. O Most Generous amongst Believers! You will not forget your servant who called you here. Have I not spoken the truth? She has made roast meat of his heart."

With a horizontal sweep of his arm Abdulla seemed to push away that last statement, and said slowly, with much meaning—

"He must be perfectly safe; do you understand? Perfectly safe—as if he was amongst his own people—till . . ."

"Till when?" whispered Babalatchi.

"Till I speak," said Abdulla. "As to Omar," He hesitated for a moment, then went on very low: "He is very old."

"Hai—ya! Old and sick," murmured Babalatchi, with sudden melancholy.

"He wanted me to kill that white man. He begged me to have him killed at once," said Abdulla, contemptuously, moving again towards the gate.

"He is impatient, like those who feel death near them," exclaimed Babalatchi, apologetically.

"Omar shall dwell with me," went on Abdulla, "when . . . But no matter. Remember! The white man must be safe."

"He lives in your shadow," answered Babalatchi, solemnly. "It is enough!" He touched his forehead and fell back to let Abdulla go first.

And now they are back in the courtyard wherefrom, at their appearance, listlessness vanishes, and all the faces become alert and interested once more. Lakamba approaches his guest, but looks at Babalatchi, who reassures him by a confident nod. Lakamba clumsily attempts a smile, and looking, with natural and ineradicable sulkiness, from under his eyebrows at the man whom he wants to honour, asks whether he would condescend to visit the place of sitting down and take food. Or perhaps he would prefer to give himself up to repose? The house is his, and what is in it, and those many men that stand afar watching the interview are his. Syed Abdulla presses his host's hand to his breast, and informs in a confidential murmur that his habits are ascetic and his temperament inclines to melancholy. No rest; no food; no use whatever for those many men who are his. Syed Abdulla is impatient to be gone. Lakamba is sorrowful but polite, in his hesitating, gloomy way. Tuan Abdulla must have fresh boatmen, and many, to shorten the dark and fatiguing road. Hai—ya! There! Boats!

By the riverside indistinct forms leap into a noisy and disorderly activity. There are cries, orders, banter, abuse. Torches blaze sending out much more smoke than light, and in their red glare Babalatchi comes up to say that the boats are ready.

Through that lurid glare Syed Abdulla, in his long white gown, seems to glide fantastically, like a dignified apparition attended by two inferior shades, and stands for a moment at the landing-place to take leave of his host and ally—whom he loves. Syed Abdulla says so distinctly before embarking, and takes his seat in the middle of the canoe under a small canopy of blue calico stretched on four sticks. Before and behind Syed Abdulla, the men squatting by the gunwales hold high the blades of their paddles in readiness for a dip, all together. Ready? Not yet. Hold on all! Syed Abdulla speaks again, while Lakamba and Babalatchi stand close on the bank to hear his words. His words are encouraging. Before the sun rises for the second time they shall meet, and Syed Abdulla's ship shall float on the waters of this river—at last! Lakamba and Babalatchi have no doubt—if Allah wills. They are in the hands of the Compassionate. No doubt. And so is Syed Abdulla, the great trader who does not

know what the word failure means; and so is the white man—the smartest business man in the islands—who is lying now by Omar's fire with his head on Aissa's lap, while Syed Abdulla flies down the muddy river with current and paddles between the sombre walls of the sleeping forest; on his way to the clear and open seas where the *Lord of the Isles* (formerly of Greenock, but condemned, sold, and registered now as of Penang) waits for its owner, and swings erratically at anchor in the currents of the capricious tide, under the crumbling red cliffs of Tanjong Mirrah.

For some time Lakamba, Sahamin, and Bahassoen looked silently into the humid darkness which had swallowed the big canoe that carried Abdulla and his unvarying good fortune. Then the two guests broke into a talk expressive of their joyful anticipations. The venerable Sahamin, as became his advanced age, found his delight in speculation as to the activities of a rather remote future. He would buy praus, he would send expeditions up the river, he would enlarge his trade, and, backed by Abdulla's capital, he would grow rich in a very few years. Very few. Meantime it would be a good thing to interview Almayer tomorrow and, profiting by the last day of the hated man's prosperity, obtain some goods from him on credit. Sahamin, thought it could be done by skilful wheedling. After all, that son of Satan was a fool, and the thing was worth doing, because the coming revolution would wipe all debts out. Sahamin did not mind imparting that idea to his companions, with much senile chuckling, while they strolled together from the riverside towards the residence. The bull-necked Lakamba, listening with pouted lips without the sign of a smile, without a gleam in his dull, bloodshot eyes, shuffled slowly across the courtyard between his two guests. But suddenly Bahassoen broke in upon the old man's prattle with the generous enthusiasm of his youth. . . . Trading was very good. But was the change that would make them happy effected yet? The white man should be despoiled with a strong hand! . . . He grew excited, spoke very loud, and his further discourse, delivered with his hand on the hilt of his sword, dealt incoherently with the honourable topics of throat-cutting, fire-raising, and with the far-famed valour of his ancestors.

Babalatchi remained behind, alone with the greatness of his conceptions. The sagacious statesman of Sambir sent a scornful glance after his noble protector and his noble protector's friends, and then stood meditating about that future which to the others seemed so assured. Not so to Babalatchi, who paid the penalty of his wisdom by a vague sense of insecurity that kept sleep at arm's length from his tired body. When he thought at last of

leaving the waterside, it was only to strike a path for himself and to creep along the fences, avoiding the middle of the courtyard where small fires glimmered and winked as though the sinister darkness there had reflected the stars of the serene heaven. He slunk past the wicket-gate of Omar's enclosure, and crept on patiently along the light bamboo palisade till he was stopped by the angle where it joined the heavy stockade of Lakamba's private ground. Standing there, he could look over the fence and see Omar's hut and the fire before its door. He could also see the shadow of two human beings sitting between him and the red glow. A man and a woman. The sight seemed to inspire the careworn sage with a frivolous desire to sing. It could hardly be called a song; it was more in the nature of a recitative without any rhythm, delivered rapidly but distinctly in a croaking and unsteady voice; and if Babalatchi considered it a song, then it was a song with a purpose and, perhaps for that reason, artistically defective. It had all the imperfections of unskilful improvisation and its subject was gruesome. It told a tale of shipwreck and of thirst, and of one brother killing another for the sake of a gourd of water. A repulsive story which might have had a purpose but possessed no moral whatever. Yet it must have pleased Babalatchi for he repeated it twice, the second time even in louder tones than at first, causing a disturbance amongst the white rice-birds and the wild fruit-pigeons which roosted on the boughs of the big tree growing in Omar's compound. There was in the thick foliage above the singer's head a confused beating of wings, sleepy remarks in bird-language, a sharp stir of leaves. The forms by the fire moved; the shadow of the woman altered its shape, and Babalatchi's song was cut short abruptly by a fit of soft and persistent coughing. He did not try to resume his efforts after that interruption, but went away stealthily, to seek—if not sleep—then, at least, repose.

13

AS SOON as Abdulla and his companions had left the enclosure, Aissa approached Willems and stood by his side. He took no notice of her expectant attitude till she touched him gently, when he turned furiously upon her and, tearing off her face-veil, trampled upon it as though it had been a mortal enemy. She looked at him with the faint smile of patient curiosity, with the puzzled interest of ignorance watching the running of a complicated piece of machinery. After he had exhausted his rage, he stood again severe and unbending looking down at the fire,

but the touch of her fingers at the nape of his neck effaced instantly the hard lines round his mouth; his eyes wavered uneasily; his lips trembled slightly. Starting with the unresisting rapidity of a particle of iron—which, quiescent one moment, leaps in the next to a powerful magnet—he moved forward, caught her in his arms and pressed her violently to his breast. He released her as suddenly, and she stumbled a little, stepped back, breathed quickly through her parted lips, and said in a tone of pleased reproof—

“O Fool-man! And if you had killed me in your strong arms what would you have done?”

“You want to live . . . and to run away from me again,” he said gently. “Tell me—do you?”

She moved towards him with very short steps, her head a little on one side, hands on hips, with a slight balancing of her body: an approach more tantalizing than an escape. He looked on, eager—charmed. She spoke jestingly.

“What am I to say to a man who has been away three days from me? Three!” she repeated, holding up playfully three fingers before Willems’ eyes. He snatched at the hand, but she was on her guard and whisked it behind her back.

“No!” she said. “I cannot be caught. But I will come. I am coming myself because I like. Do not move. Do not touch me with your mighty hands, O child!”

As she spoke she made a step nearer, then another. Willems did not stir. Pressing against him she stood on tiptoe to look into his eyes, and her own seemed to grow bigger, glistening and tender, appealing and promising. With that look she drew the man’s soul away from him through his immobile pupils, and from Willems’ features the spark of reason vanished under her gaze and was replaced by an appearance of physical well-being, an ecstasy of the senses which had taken possession of his rigid body; an ecstasy that drove out regrets, hesitation and doubt, and proclaimed its terrible work by an appalling aspect of idiotic beatitude. He never stirred a limb, hardly breathed, but stood in stiff immobility, absorbing the delight of her close contact by every pore.

“Closer! Closer!” he murmured.

Slowly she raised her arms, put them over his shoulders, and clasping her hands at the back of his neck, swung off the length of her arms. Her head fell back, the eyelids dropped slightly, and her thick hair hung straight down: a mass of ebony touched by the red gleams of the fire. He stood unyielding under the strain, as solid and motionless as one of the big trees of the surrounding forests; and his eyes looked at the modelling of her

chin, at the outline of her neck, at the swelling of her bosom, with the famished and concentrated expression of a starving man looking at food. She drew herself up to him and rubbed her head against his cheek slowly and gently. He sighed. She, with her hands still on his shoulders, glanced up at the placid stars and said—

“The night is half gone. We shall finish it by this fire. By this fire you shall tell me all; your words and Syed Abdulla’s words; and listening to you I shall forget the three days—because I am good. Tell me—am I good?”

He said “Yes” dreamily, and she ran off towards the big house.

When she came back, balancing a roll of fine mats on her head, he had replenished the fire and was ready to help her in arranging a couch on the side of it nearest to the hut. She sank down with a quick but gracefully controlled movement, and he threw himself full length with impatient haste, as if he wished to forestall somebody. She took his head on her knees, and when he felt her hands touching his face, her fingers playing with his hair, he had an expression of being taken possession of; he experienced a sense of peace, of rest, of happiness, and of soothing delight. His hands strayed upwards about her neck, and he drew her down so as to have her face above his. Then he whispered—“I wish I could die like this—now!” She looked at him with her big sombre eyes, in which there was no responsive light. His thought was so remote from her understanding that she let the words pass by unnoticed, like the breath of the wind, like the flight of a cloud. Woman though she was, she could not comprehend, in her simplicity, the tremendous compliment of that speech, that whisper of deadly happiness, so sincere, so spontaneous, coming so straight from the heart—like every corruption. It was the voice of madness, of a delirious peace, of happiness that is infamous, cowardly, and so exquisite that the debased mind refuses to contemplate its termination: for to the victims of such happiness the moment of its ceasing is the beginning afresh of that torture which is its price.

With her brows slightly knitted in the determined preoccupation of her own desires, she said—

“Now tell me all. All the words spoken between you and Syed Abdulla.”

Tell what? What words? Her voice recalled back the consciousness that had departed under her touch, and he became aware of the passing minutes every one of which was like a reproach; of those minutes that falling, slow, reluctant, irresistible into the past, marked his footsteps on the way to perdition. Not that he had any conviction about it, any notion of the possible ending on that painful road. It was an indistinct feeling, a threat

of suffering like the confused warning of coming disease, an inarticulate monition of evil made up of fear and pleasure, of resignation and of revolt. He was ashamed of his state of mind. After all, what was he afraid of? Were those scruples? Why that hesitation to think, to speak of what he intended doing? Scruples were for imbeciles. His clear duty was to make himself happy. Did he ever take an oath of fidelity to Lingard? No. Well then—he would not let any interest of that old fool stand between Willems and Willems' happiness. Happiness? Was he not, perchance, on a false track? Happiness meant money. Much money. At least he had always thought so till he had experienced those new sensations which . . .

Aissa's question, repeated impatiently, interrupted his musings, and looking up at her face shining above him in the dim light of the fire he stretched his limbs luxuriously and obedient to her desire, he spoke slowly and hardly above his breath. She, with her head close to his lips, listened absorbed, interested, in attentive immobility. The many noises of the great courtyard were hushed up gradually by the sleep that stilled all voices and closed all eyes. Then somebody droned out a song with a nasal drawl at the end of every verse. He stirred. She put her hand suddenly on his lips and sat upright. There was a feeble coughing, a rustle of leaves, and then a complete silence took possession of the land; a silence cold, mournful, profound; more like death than peace; more hard to bear than the fiercest tumult. As soon as she removed her hand he hastened to speak, so insupportable to him was that stillness perfect and absolute in which his thoughts seemed to ring with the loudness of shouts.

"Who was there making that noise?" he asked.

"I do not know. He is gone now," she answered, hastily. "Tell me, you will not return to your people; not without me. Not with me. Do you promise?"

"I have promised already. I have no people of my own. Have I not told you, that you are everybody to me?"

"Ah, yes," she said, slowly, "but I like to hear you say that again—every day, and every night, whenever I ask; and never to be angry because I ask. I am afraid of white women who are shameless and have fierce eyes." She scanned his features close for a moment and added: "Are they very beautiful? They must be."

"I do not know," he whispered, thoughtfully. "And if I ever did know, looking at you I have forgotten."

"Forgotten! And for three days and two nights you have forgotten me also! Why? Why were you angry with me when I spoke at first of Tuan Abdulla, in the days when we lived beside

the brook? You remembered somebody then. Somebody in the land whence you come. Your tongue is false. You are white indeed, and your heart is full of deception. I know it. And yet I cannot help believing you when you talk of your love for me. But I am afraid!"

He felt flattered and annoyed by her vehemence, and said—

"Well, I am with you now. I did come back. And it was you that went away."

"When you have helped Abdulla against the Rajah Laut, who is the first of white men, I shall not be afraid any more," she whispered.

"You must believe what I say when I tell you that there never was another woman; that there is nothing for me to regret, and nothing but my enemies to remember."

"Where do you come from?" she said, impulsive and inconsequent, in a passionate whisper. "What is that land beyond the great sea from which you come? A land of lies and of evil from which nothing but misfortune ever comes to us—who are not white. Did you not at first ask me to go there with you? That is why I went away."

"I shall never ask you again."

"And there is no woman waiting for you there?"

"No!" said Willems, firmly.

She bent over him. Her lips hovered above his face and her long hair brushed his cheeks.

"You taught me the love of your people which is of the Devil," she murmured, and bending still lower, she said faintly, "Like this?"

"Yes, like this!" he answered very low, in a voice that trembled slightly with eagerness; and she pressed suddenly her lips to his while he closed his eyes in an ecstasy of delight.

There was a long interval of silence. She stroked his head with gentle touches, and he lay dreamily, perfectly happy but for the annoyance of an indistinct vision of a well-known figure; a man going away from him and diminishing in a long perspective of fantastic trees, whose every leaf was an eye looking after that man, who walked away growing smaller, but never getting out of sight for all his steady progress. He felt a desire to see him vanish, a hurried impatience of his disappearance, and he watched for it with a careful and irksome effort. There was something familiar about that figure. Why! Himself! He gave a sudden start and opened his eyes, quivering with the emotion of that quick return from so far, of finding himself back by the fire with the rapidity of a flash of lightning. It had been half a dream; he had slumbered in her arms for a few seconds. Only the beginning of a dream—

nothing more. But it was some time before he recovered from the shock of seeing himself go away so deliberately, so definitely, so unguardedly; and going away—where? Now, if he had not woke up in time he would never have come back again from there; from whatever place he was going to. He felt indignant. It was like an evasion, like a prisoner breaking his parole—that thing slinking off stealthily while he slept. He was very indignant, and was also astonished at the absurdity of his own emotions.

She felt him tremble, and murmuring tender words, pressed his head to her breast. Again he felt very peaceful with a peace that was as complete as the silence round them. He muttered—

“You are tired, Aïssa.”

She answered so low that it was like a sigh shaped into faint words.

“I shall watch your sleep, O child!”

He lay very quiet, and listened to the beating of her heart. That sound, light, rapid, persistent, and steady; her very life beating against his cheek, gave him a clear perception of secure ownership, strengthened his belief in his possession of that human being, was like an assurance of the vague felicity of the future. There were no regrets, no doubts, no hesitation now. Had there ever been? All that seemed far away, ages ago—as unreal and pale as the fading memory of some delirium. All the anguish, suffering, strife of the past days; the humiliation and anger of his downfall; all that was an infamous nightmare, a thing born in sleep to be forgotten and leave no trace—and true life was this: this dreamy immobility with his head against her heart that beat so steadily.

He was broad awake now, with that tingling wakefulness of the tired body which succeeds to the few refreshing seconds of irresistible sleep, and his wide-open eyes looked absently at the doorway of Omar's hut. The reed walls glistened in the light of the fire, the smoke of which, thin and blue, drifted slanting in a succession of rings and spirals across the doorway, whose empty blackness seemed to him impenetrable and enigmatical like a curtain hiding vast spaces full of unexpected surprises. This was only his fancy, but it was absorbing enough to make him accept the sudden appearance of a head, coming out of the gloom, as part of his idle fantasy or as the beginning of another short dream, of another vagary of his overtired brain. A face with drooping eyelids, old, thin, and yellow, above the scattered white of a long beard that touched the earth. A head without a body, only a foot above the ground, turning slightly from side to side on the edge of the circle of light as if to catch the radiating heat of the fire on either cheek in succession. He watched it in passive amazement, growing distinct, as if coming nearer to him, and the

confused outlines of a body crawling on all fours came out, creeping inch by inch towards the fire, with a silent and all but imperceptible movement. He was astounded at the appearance of that blind head dragging that crippled body behind, without a sound, without a change in the composure of the sightless face, which was plain one second, blurred the next in the play of the light that drew it to itself steadily. A mute face with a kriss between its lips. This was no dream. Omar's face. But why? What was he after?

He was too indolent in the happy languor of the moment to answer the question. It darted through his brain and passed out, leaving him free to listen again to the beating of her heart; to that precious and delicate sound which filled the quiet immensity of the night. Glancing upwards he saw the motionless head of the woman looking down at him in a tender gleam of liquid white between the long eyelashes, whose shadow rested on the soft curve of her cheek; and under the caress of that look, the uneasy wonder and the obscure fear of that apparition, crouching and creeping in turns towards the fire that was its guide, were lost—were drowned in the quietude of all his senses, as pain is drowned in the flood of drowsy serenity that follows upon a dose of opium.

He altered the position of his head by ever so little, and now could see easily that apparition which he had seen a minute before and had nearly forgotten already. It had moved closer, gliding and noiseless like the shadow of some nightmare, and now it was there, very near, motionless and still as if listening; one hand and one knee advanced; the neck stretched out and the head turned full towards the fire. He could see the emaciated face, the skin shiny over the prominent bones, the black shadows of the hollow temples and sunken cheeks, and the two patches of blackness over the eyes, over those eyes that were dead and could not see. What was the impulse which drove out this blind cripple into the night to creep and crawl towards that fire? He looked at him fascinated, but, the face, with its shifting lights and shadows, let out nothing, closed and impenetrable like a walled door.

Omar raised himself to a kneeling posture and sank on his heels, with his hands hanging down before him. Willems, looking out of his dreamy numbness, could see plainly the kriss between the thin lips, a bar across the face; the handle on one side where the polished wood caught a red gleam from the fire and the thin line of the blade running to a dull black point on the other. He felt an inward shock, which left his body passive in Aissa's embrace, but filled his breast with a tumult of powerless fear; and he perceived suddenly that it was his own death that was groping

towards him; that it was the hate of himself and the hate of her love for him which drove this helpless wreck of a once brilliant and resolute pirate, to attempt a desperate deed that would be the glorious and supreme consolation of an unhappy old age. And while he looked, paralyzed with dread, at the father who had resumed his cautious advance—blind like fate, persistent like destiny—he listened with greedy eagerness to the heart of the daughter beating light, rapid, and steady against his head.

He was in the grip of horrible fear; of a fear whose cold hands robs its victim of all will and of all power; of all wish to escape, to resist, or to move; which destroys hope and despair alike, and holds the empty and useless carcass as if in a vice under the coming stroke. It was not the fear of death—he had faced danger before—it was not even the fear of that particular form of death. It was not the fear of the end, for he knew that the end would not come then. A movement, a leap, a shout would save him from the feeble hand of the blind old man, from that hand that even now was, with cautious sweeps along the ground, feeling for his body in the darkness. It was the unreasoning fear of this glimpse into the unknown things, into those motives, impulses, desires he had ignored, but that had lived in the breasts of despised men, close by his side, and were revealed to him for a second, to be hidden again behind the black mists of doubt and deception. It was not death that frightened him: it was the horror of bewildered life where he could understand nothing and nobody round him; where he could guide, control, comprehend nothing and no one—not even himself.

He felt a touch on his side. That contact, lighter than the caress of a mother's hand on the cheek of a sleeping child, had for him the force of a crushing blow. Omar had crept close, and now, kneeling above him, held the kris in one hand while the other skimmed over his jacket up towards his breast in gentle touches; but the blind face, still turned to the heat of the fire, was set and immovable in its aspect of stony indifference to things it could not hope to see. With an effort Willems took his eyes off the deathlike mask and turned them up to Aïssa's head. She sat motionless as if she had been part of the sleeping earth, then suddenly he saw her big sombre eyes open out wide in a piercing stare and felt the convulsive pressure of her hands pinning his arms along his body. A second dragged itself out, slow and bitter, like a day of mourning; a second full of regret and grief for that faith in her which took its flight from the shattered ruins of his trust. She was holding him! She too! He felt her heart give a great leap, his head slipped down on her knees, he closed his eyes and there was nothing. Nothing! It

was as if she had died; as though her heart had leaped out into the night, abandoning him, defenceless and alone, in an empty world.

His head struck the ground heavily as she flung him aside in her sudden rush. He lay as if stunned, face up, and daring not to move, did not see the struggle, but heard the piercing shriek of mad fear, her low angry words; another shriek dying out in a moan. When he got up at last he looked at Aïssa kneeling over her father, he saw her bent back in the effort of holding him down, Omar's contorted limbs, a hand thrown up above her head and her quick movement grasping the wrist. He made an impulsive step forward, but she turned a wild face to him and called out over her shoulder—

‘Keep back! Do not come near! Do not. . . .’

And he stopped short, his arms hanging lifelessly by his side, as if those words had changed him into stone. She was afraid of his possible violence, but in the unsettling of all his convictions he was struck with the frightful thought that she preferred to kill her father all by herself; and the last stage of their struggle, at which he looked as though a red fog had filled his eyes, loomed up with an unnatural ferocity, with a sinister meaning; like something monstrous and depraved, forcing its complicity upon him under the cover of that awful night. He was horrified and grateful; drawn irresistibly to her—and ready to run away. He could not move at first—then he did not want to stir. He wanted to see what would happen. He saw her lift, with a tremendous effort, the apparently lifeless body into the hut, and remained standing, after they disappeared, with the vivid image in his eyes of that head swaying on her shoulder, the lower jaw hanging down, collapsed, passive, meaningless, like the head of a corpse.

Then after a while he heard her voice speaking inside, harshly, with an agitated abruptness of tone; and in answer there were groans and broken murmurs of exhaustion. She spoke louder. He heard her saying violently—“No! No! Never!”

And again a plaintive murmur of entreaty as of some one begging for a supreme favour, with a last breath. Then she said—

“Never! I would sooner strike it into my own heart.”

She came out, stood panting for a short moment in the doorway, and then stepped into the firelight. Behind her, through the darkness came the sound of words calling the vengeance of heaven on her head, rising higher, shrill, strained, repeating the curse over and over again—till the voice cracked in a passionate shriek that died out into hoarse muttering ending with a deep and prolonged sigh. She stood facing Willem's, one hand behind her back, the other raised in a gesture compelling attention,

and she listened in that attitude till all was still inside the hut. Then she made another step forward and her hand dropped slowly.

"Nothing but misfortune," she whispered, absently, to herself. "Nothing but misfortune to us who are not white." The anger and excitement died out of her face, and she looked straight at Willems with an intense and mournful gaze.

He recovered his senses and his power of speech with a sudden start.

"Aissa," he exclaimed, and the words broke out through his lips with hurried nervousness. "Aissa! How can I live here? Trust me. Believe in me. Let us go away from here. Go very far away! Very far; you and I!"

He did not stop to ask himself whether he could escape, and how, and where. He was carried away by the flood of hate, disgust, and contempt of a white man for that blood which is not his blood, for that race which is not his race; for the brown skins; for the hearts false like the sea, blacker than night. This feeling of repulsion overmastered his reason in a clear conviction of the impossibility for him to live with her people. He urged her passionately to fly with him because out of all that abhorred crowd he wanted this one woman, but wanted her away from them, away from that race of slaves and cut-throats from which she sprang. He wanted her for himself—far from everybody, in some safe and dumb solitude. And as he spoke his anger and contempt rose, his hate became almost fear; and his desire of her grew immense, burning, illogical and merciless; crying to him through all his senses; louder than his hate, stronger than his fear, deeper than his contempt—irresistible and certain like death itself.

Standing at a little distance, just within the light—but on the threshold of that darkness from which she had come—she listened, one hand still behind her back, the other arm stretched out with the hand half open as if to catch the fleeting words that rang around her, passionate, menacing, imploring, but all tinged with the anguish of his suffering, all hurried by the impatience that gnawed his breast. And while she listened she felt a slowing down of her heart-beats as the meaning of his appeal grew clearer before her indignant eyes, as she saw with rage and pain the edifice of her love, her own work, crumble slowly to pieces, destroyed by that man's fears, by that man's falseness. Her memory recalled the days by the brook when she had listened to other words—to other thoughts—to promises and to pleadings for other things, which came from that man's lips at the bidding of her look or her smile, at the nod of her head, at the whisper of

her lips. Was there then in his heart something else than her image, other desires than the desires of her love, other fears than the fear of losing her? How could that be? Had she grown ugly or old in a moment? She was appalled, surprised and angry with the anger of unexpected humiliation; and her eyes looked fixedly, sombre and steady, at that man born in the land of violence and of evil wherefrom nothing but misfortune comes to those who are not white. Instead of thinking of her caresses, instead of forgetting all the world in her embrace, he was thinking yet of his people; of that people that steals every land, masters every sea, that knows no mercy and no truth—knows nothing but its own strength. O man of strong arm and of false heart! Go with him to a far country, be lost in the throng of cold eyes and false hearts—lose him there! Never! He was mad—mad with fear; but he should not escape her! She would keep him here a slave and a master; here where he was alone with her; where he must live for her—or die. She had a right to his love which was of her making, to the love that was in him now, while he spoke those words without sense. She must put between him and other white men a barrier of hate. He must not only stay, but he must also keep his promise to Abdulla, the fulfilment of which would make her safe. . . .

“Aissa, let us go! With you by my side I would attack them with my naked hands. Or no! To-morrow we shall be outside, on board Abdulla’s ship. You shall come with me and then I could . . . If the ship went ashore by some chance, then we could steal a canoe and escape in the confusion. . . . You are not afraid of the sea . . . of the sea that would give me freedom . . .”

He was approaching her gradually with extended arms, while he pleaded ardently in incoherent words that ran over and tripped each other in the extreme eagerness of his speech. She stepped back, keeping her distance, her eyes on his face, watching on it the play of his doubts and of his hopes with a piercing gaze, that seemed to search out the innermost recesses of his thought; and it was as if she had drawn slowly the darkness round her, wrapping herself in its undulating folds that made her indistinct and vague. He followed her step by step till at last they both stopped, facing each other under the big tree of the enclosure. The solitary exile of the forests, great, motionless and solemn in his abandonment, left alone by the life of ages that had been pushed away from him by those pigmies that crept at his foot, towered high and straight above their heads. He seemed to look on, dispassionate and imposing, in his lonely greatness, spreading his branches wide in a gesture of lofty protection, as if to hide them in the sombre

shelter of innumerable leaves; as if moved by the disdainful compassion of the strong, by the scornful pity of an aged giant, to screen this struggle of two human hearts from the cold scrutiny of glittering stars.

The last cry of his appeal to her mercy rose loud, vibrated under the sombre canopy, darted among the boughs startling the white birds that slept wing to wing—and died without an echo, strangled in the dense mass of unstirring leaves. He could not see her face, but he heard her sighs and the distracted murmur of indistinct words. Then, as he listened holding his breath, she exclaimed suddenly—

“Have you heard him? He has cursed me because I love you. You brought me suffering and strife—and his curse. And now you want to take me far away where I would lose you, lose my life; because your love is my life now. What else is there? Do not move,” she cried violently, as he stirred a little—“do not speak! Take this! Sleep in peace!”

He saw a shadowy movement of her arm. Something whizzed past and struck the ground behind him, close to the fire. Instinctively he turned round to look at it. A kriss without its sheath lay by the embers; a sinuous dark object, looking like something that had been alive and was now crushed, dead and very inoffensive; a black wavy outline very distinct and still in the dull red glow. Without thinking he moved to pick it up, stooping with the sad and humble movement of a beggar gathering the alms flung into the dust of the roadside. Was this the answer to his pleadings, to the hot and living words that came from his heart? Was this the answer thrown at him like an insult, that thing made of wood and iron, insignificant and venomous, fragile and deadly? He held it by the blade and looked at the handle stupidly for a moment before he let it fall again at his feet; and when he turned round he faced only the night:—the night immense, profound and quiet; a sea of darkness in which she had disappeared without leaving a trace.

He moved forward with uncertain steps, putting out both his hands before him with the anguish of a man blinded suddenly.

“Aïssa!” he cried—“come to me at once.”

He peered and listened, but saw nothing, heard nothing. After a while the solid blackness seemed to wave before his eyes like a curtain disclosing movements but hiding forms, and he heard light and hurried footsteps, then the short clatter of the gate leading to Lakamba’s private enclosure. He sprang forward and brought up against the rough timber in time to hear the words, “Quick! Quick!” and the sound of the wooden bar dropped on the other side, securing the gate. With his arms

thrown up, the palms against the paling, he slid down in a heap on the ground.

"Aïssa," he said, pleadingly, pressing his lips to a clink between the stakes. "Aïssa, do you hear me? Come back! I will do what you want, give you all you desire—if I have to set the whole Sambir on fire and put that fire out with blood. Only come back. Now! At once! Are you there? Do you hear me? Aïssa!"

On the other side there were startled whispers of feminine voices; a frightened little laugh suddenly interrupted; some woman's admiring murmur—"This is brave talk!" Then after a short silence Aïssa cried—

"Sleep in peace—for the time of your going is near. Now I am afraid of you. Afraid of your fear. When you return with Tuan Abdulla you shall be great. You will find me here. And there will be nothing but love. Nothing else!—Always—! 'Till we die!"

He listened to the shuffle of footsteps going away, and staggered to his feet, mute with the excess of his passionate anger against that being so savage and so charming; loathing her, himself, everybody he had ever known; the earth, the sky, the very air he drew into his oppressed chest; loathing it because it made him live, loathing her because she made him suffer. But he could not leave that gate through which she had passed. He wandered a little way off, then swerved round, came back and fell down again by the stockade only to rise suddenly in another attempt to break away from the spell that held him, that brought him back there, dumb, obedient and furious. And under the immobilized gesture of lofty protection in the branches outspread wide above his head, under the high branches where white birds slept wing to wing in the shelter of countless leaves, he tossed like a grain of dust in a whirlwind—sinking and rising—round and round—always near that gate. All through the languid stillness of that night he fought with the impalpable; he fought with the shadows, with the darkness, with the silence. He fought without a sound, striking futile blows, dashing from side to side; obstinate, hopeless, and always beaten back; like a man bewitched within the invisible sweep of a magic circle.

PART THREE

14

“**Y**ES! Cat, dog, anything that can scratch or bite; as long as it is harmful enough and mangy enough. A sick tiger would make you happy—of all things. A half-dead tiger that you could weep over and palm upon some poor devil in your power, to tend and nurse for you. Never mind the consequences—to the poor devil. Let him be mangled or eaten up, of course! You haven’t any pity to spare for the victims of your infernal charity. Not you! Your tender heart bleeds only for what is poisonous and deadly. I curse the day when you set your benevolent eyes on him. I curse it . . .”

“Now then! Now then!” growled Lingard in his moustache. Almayer, who had talked himself up to the choking point, drew a long breath and went on—

“Yes! It has been always so. Always. As far back as I can remember. Don’t you recollect? What about that half-starved dog you brought on board in Bangkok in your arms. In your arms by . . . ! It went mad next day and bit the serang. You don’t mean to say you have forgotten? The best serang you ever had! You said so yourself while you were helping us to lash him down to the chain-cable, just before he died in his fits. Now, didn’t you? Two wives and ever so many children the man left. That was your doing. . . . And when you went out of your way and risked your ship to rescue some Chinamen from a water-logged junk in Formosa Straits, that was also a clever piece of business. Wasn’t it? Those damned Chinamen rose on you before forty-eight hours. They were cut-throats, those poor fishermen. You knew they were cut-throats before you made up your mind to run down on a lee shore in a gale of wind to save them. A mad trick! If they hadn’t been scoundrels—hopeless scoundrels—you would not have put your ship in jeopardy for them. I know. You would not have risked the lives of your crew—that crew you loved so—and your own life. Wasn’t that foolish! And, besides, you were not honest. Suppose you had been drowned? I would have been in a pretty mess then, left alone here with that adopted daughter of yours. Your duty was to myself first. I married that girl because you promised to make my fortune. You know you did! And then three months afterwards you go and do that mad trick—for a lot of Chinamen too. Chinamen! You have no

morality. I might have been ruined for the sake of those murderous scoundrels that, after all, had to be driven overboard after killing ever so many of your crew—of your beloved crew! Do you call that honest?"

"Well, well!" muttered Lingard, chewing nervously the stump of his cheroot that had gone out and looking at Almayer—who stamped wildly about the verandah—much as a shepherd might look at a pet sheep in his obedient flock turning unexpectedly upon him in enraged revolt. He seemed disconcerted, contemptuously angry yet somewhat amused; and also a little hurt as if at some bitter jest at his own expense. Almayer stopped suddenly, and crossing his arms on his breast, bent his body forward and went on speaking.

"I might have been left then in an awkward hole—all on account of your absurd disregard for your safety—yet I bore no grudge. I knew your weaknesses. But now—when I think of it! Now, we are ruined. Ruined! Ruined! My poor little Nina. Ruined!"

He slapped his thighs smartly, walked with small steps this way and that, seized a chair, planted it with a bang before Lingard, and sat down staring at the old seaman with haggard eyes. Lingard, returning his stare steadily, dived slowly into various pockets, fished out at last a box of matches and proceeded to light his cheroot carefully, rolling it round and round between his lips, without taking his gaze for a moment off the distressed Almayer. Then from behind a cloud of tobacco smoke he said calmly—

"If you had been in trouble as often as I have, my boy, you wouldn't carry on so. I have been ruined more than once. Well, here I am."

"Yes, here you are," interrupted Almayer. "Much good it is to me. Had you been here a month ago it would have been of some use. But now! . . . You might as well be a thousand miles off."

"You scold like a drunken fish-wife," said Lingard, serenely. He got up and moved slowly to the front rail of the verandah. The floor shook and the whole house vibrated under his heavy step. For a moment he stood with his back to Almayer, looking out on the river and forest of the east bank, then turned round and gazed mildly down upon him.

"It's very lonely this morning here. Hey?" he said.

Almayer lifted up his head.

"Ah! you notice it—don't you? I should think it is lonely! Yes, Captain Lingard, your day is over in Sambir. Only a month ago this verandah would have been full of people coming to greet

you. Fellows would be coming up those steps grinning and salaaming—to you and to me. But our day is over. And not by my fault either. You can't say that. It's all the doing of that pet rascal of yours; ah! He is a beauty! You should have seen him leading that hellish crowd. You would have been proud of your old favourite."

"Smart fellow that," muttered Lingard, thoughtfully. Almayer jumped up with a shriek.

"And that's all you have to say! Smart fellow! O Lord!"

"Don't make a show of yourself. Sit down. Let's talk quietly. I want to know all about it. So he led?"

"He was the soul of the whole thing. He piloted Abdulla's ship in. He ordered everything and everybody," said Almayer, who sat down again, with a resigned air.

"When did it happen—exactly?"

"On the sixteenth I heard the first rumours of Abdulla's ship being in the river; a thing I refused to believe at first. Next day I could not doubt any more. There was a great council held openly in Lakamba's place where almost everybody in Sambir attended. On the eighteenth the *Lord of the Isles* was anchored in Sambir reach, abreast of my house. Let's see. Six weeks to-day, exactly."

"And all that happened like this? All of a sudden. You never heard anything—no warning. Nothing. Never had an idea that something was up? Come, Almayer!"

"Heard! Yes, I used to hear something every day. Mostly lies. Is there anything else in Sambir?"

"You might not have believed them," observed Lingard. "In fact you ought not to have believed everything that was told to you, as if you had been a green hand on his first voyage."

Almayer moved in his chair uneasily.

"That scoundrel came here one day," he said. "He had been away from the house for a couple of months living with that woman. I only heard about him now and then from Patalolo's people when they came over. Well one day, about noon, he appeared in this courtyard, as if he had been jerked up from hell—where he belongs."

Lingard took his cheroot out, and, with his mouth full of white smoke that oozed out through his parted lips, listened, attentive. After a short pause Almayer went on, looking at the floor moodily—

"I must say he looked awful. Had a bad bout of the ague probably. The left shore is very unhealthy. Strange that only the breadth of the river . . ."

He dropped off into deep thoughtfulness as if he had forgotten

his grievances in a bitter meditation upon the unsanitary condition of the virgin forests on the left bank. Lingard took this opportunity to expel the smoke in a mighty expiration and threw the stump of his cheroot over his shoulder.

"Go on," he said, after a while. "He came to see you . . ."

"But it wasn't unhealthy enough to finish him, worse luck!" went on Almayer, rousing himself, "and, as I said, he turned up here with his brazen impudence. He bullied me, he threatened vaguely. He wanted to scare me, to blacknail me. Me! And, by heaven—he said you would approve. You! Can you conceive such impudence? I couldn't exactly make out what he was driving at. Had I known, I would have approved him. Yes! With a bang on the head. But how could I guess that he knew enough to pilot a ship through the entrance you always said was so difficult. And, after all, that was the only danger. I could deal with anybody here—but when Abdulla came. . . . That barque of his is armed. He carries twelve brass six-pounders, and about thirty men. Desperate beggars. Sumatra men, from Deli and Achcen. Fight all day and ask for more in the evening. That kind."

"I know, I know," said Lingard, impatiently.

"Of course, then, they were cheeky as much as you please after he anchored abreast of our jetty. Willems brought her up himself in the best berth. I could see him from this verandah standing forward, together with the half-caste master. And that woman was there too. Close to him. I heard they took her on board off Lakamba's place. Willems said he would not go higher without her. Stormed and raged. Frightened them, I believe. Abdulla had to interfere. She came off alone in a canoe, and no sooner on deck than she fell at his feet before all hands, embraced his knees, wept, raved, begged his pardon. Why? I wonder. Everybody in Sambir is talking of it. They never heard tell or saw anything like it. I have all this from Ali, who goes about in the settlement and brings me the news. I had better know what is going on—hadn't I? From what I can make out, they—he and that woman—are looked upon as something mysterious—beyond comprehension. Some think them mad. They live alone with an old woman in a house outside Lakamba's campong and are greatly respected—or feared, I should say rather. At least, he is. He is very violent. She knows nobody, sees nobody, will speak to nobody but him. Never leaves him for a moment. It's the talk of the place. There are other rumours. From what I hear I suspect that Lakamba and Abdulla are tired of him. There's also talk of him going away in the *Lord of the Isles*—when she leaves here for the southward—as a kind of Abdulla's agent.

At any rate, he must take the ship out. The half-caste is not equal to it as yet."

Lingard, who had listened absorbed till then, began now to walk with measured steps. Almayer ceased talking and followed him with his eyes as he paced up and down with a quarter-deck swing, tormenting and twisting his long white beard, his face perplexed and thoughtful.

"So he came to you first of all, did he?" asked Lingard, without stopping.

"Yes. I told you so. He did come. Came to extort money, goods—I don't know what else. Wanted to set up as a trader—the swine! I kicked his hat into the courtyard, and he went after it, and that was the last of him till he showed up with Abdulla. How could I know that he could do harm in that way? Or in any way at that! Any local rising I could put down easy with my own men and with Patalolo's help."

"Oh! yes. Patalolo. No good. Eh? Did you try him at all?"

"Didn't I!" exclaimed Almayer. "I went to see him myself on the twelfth. That was four days before Abdulla entered the river. In fact, same day Willems tried to get at me. I did feel a little uneasy then. Patalolo assured me that there was no human being that did not love me in Sambir. Looked as wise as an owl. Told me not to listen to the lies of wicked people from down the river. He was alluding to that man Bulangi, who lives up the sea reach, and who had sent me word that a strange ship was anchored outside—which, of course, I repeated to Patalolo. He would not believe. Kept on mumbling 'No! No! No!' like an old parrot, his head all of a tremble, all beslobbered with betel-nut juice. I thought there was something queer about him. Seemed so restless, and as if in a hurry to get rid of me. Well. Next day that one-eyed malefactor who lives with Lakamba—what's his name—Babalatchi, put in an appearance here. Came about mid-day, casually like, and stood there on this verandah chatting about one thing and another. Asking when I expected you, and so on. Then, incidentally, he mentioned that they—his master and himself—were very much bothered by a ferocious white man—my friend—who was hanging about that woman—Omar's daughter. Asked my advice. Very deferential and proper. I told him the white man was not my friend, and that they had better kick him out. Whereupon he went away salaaming, and protesting his friendship and his master's good will. Of course I know now the infernal nigger came to spy and to talk over some of my men. Anyway, eight were missing at the evening muster. Then I took alarm. Did not dare to leave my house unguarded. You know what my wife is, don't you? And I did not care to take

the child with me—it being late—so I sent a message to Patalolo to say that we ought to consult; that there were rumours and uneasiness in the settlement. Do you know what answer I got?"

Lingard stopped short in his walk before Almayer, who went on, after an impressive pause, with growing animation.

"Ali brought it: 'The Rajah sends a friend's greeting, and does not understand the message.' That was all. Not a word more could Ali get out of him. I could see that Ali was pretty well scared. He hung about, arranging my hammock—one thing and another. Then just before going away he mentioned that the watergate of the Rajah's place was heavily barred, but that he could see only very few men about the courtyard. Finally he said, 'There is darkness in our Rajah's house, but no sleep. Only darkness and fear and the wailing of women.' Cheerful, wasn't it? It made me feel cold down my back somehow. After Ali slipped away I stood here—by this table, and listened to the shouting and drumming in the settlement. Racket enough for twenty weddings. It was a little past midnight then."

Again Almayer stopped in his narrative with an abrupt shutting of lips, as if he had said all that there was to tell, and Lingard stood staring at him, pensive and silent. A big bluebottle fly flew in recklessly into the cool verandah, and darted with loud buzzing between the two men. Lingard struck at it with his hat. The fly swerved, and Almayer dodged his head out of the way. Then Lingard aimed another ineffectual blow; Almayer jumped up and waved his arms about. The fly buzzed desperately, and the vibration of minute wings sounded in the peace of the early morning like a far-off string orchestra accompanying the hollow, determined stamping of the two men, who, with heads thrown back and arms gyrating on high, or again bending low with infuriated lunges, were intent upon killing the intruder. But suddenly the buzz died out in a thin thrill away in the open space of the courtyard, leaving Lingard and Almayer standing face to face in the fresh silence of the young day, looking very puzzled and idle, their arms hanging uselessly by their sides—like men disheartened by some portentous failure.

"Look at that!" muttered Lingard. "Got away after all."

"Nuisance," said Almayer in the same tone. "Riverside is overrun with them. This house is badly placed . . . mosquitoes . . . and these big flies . . . last week stung Nina . . . been ill four days . . . poor child. . . . I wonder what such damned things are made for!"

AFTER a long silence, during which Almayer had moved towards the table and sat down, his head between his hands, staring straight before him, Lingard, who had recommenced walking, cleared his throat and said—

“What was it you were saying?”

“Ah! Yes! You should have seen this settlement that night. I don’t think anybody went to bed. I walked down to the point and could see them. They had a big bonfire in the palm grove, and the talk went on there till the morning. When I came back here and sat in the dark verandah in this quiet house I felt so frightfully lonely that I stole in and took the child out of her cot and brought her here into my hammock. If it hadn’t been for her I am sure I would have gone mad; I felt so utterly alone and helpless. Remember, I hadn’t heard from you for four months. Didn’t know whether you were alive or dead. Patalolo would have nothing to do with me. My own men were deserting me like rats do a sinking hulk. That was a black night for me, Captain Lingard. A black night as I sat here not knowing what would happen next. They were so excited and rowdy that I really feared they would come and burn the house over my head. I went and brought my revolver. Laid it loaded on the table. There were such awful yells now and then. Luckily the child slept through it, and seeing her so pretty and peaceful steadied me somehow. Couldn’t believe there was any violence in this world, looking at her lying so quiet and so unconscious of what went on. But it was very hard. Everything was at an end. You must understand that on that night there was no government in Sambir. Nothing to restrain those fellows. Patalolo had collapsed. I was abandoned by my own people, and all that lot could vent their spite on me if they wanted. They know no gratitude. How many times haven’t I saved this settlement from starvation? Absolute starvation. Only three months ago I distributed again a lot of rice on credit. There was nothing to eat in this infernal place. They came begging on their knees. There isn’t a man in Sambir, big or little, who is not in debt to Lingard & Co. Not one. You ought to be satisfied. You always said that was the right policy for us. Well, I carried it out. Ah! Captain Lingard, a policy like that should be backed by loaded rifles . . .”

“You had them!” exclaimed Lingard in the midst of his promenade, that went on more rapidly as Almayer talked: the headlong tramp of a man hurrying on to do something violent.

The verandah was full of dust, oppressive and choking, which rose under the old seaman's feet, and made Almayer cough again and again.

"Yes, I had! Twenty. And not a finger to pull a trigger. It's easy to talk," he spluttered, his face very red.

Lingard dropped into a chair, and leaned back with one hand stretched out at length upon the table, the other thrown over the back of his seat. The dust settled, and the sun surging above the forest flooded the verandah with a clear light. Almayer got up and busied himself in lowering the split rattan screens that hung between the columns of the verandah.

"Phew!" said Lingard, "it will be a hot day. That's right, my boy. Keep the sun out. We don't want to be roasted alive here."

Almayer came back, sat down, and spoke very calmly—

"In the morning I went across to see Patalolo. I took the child with me, of course. I found the watergate barred, and had to walk round through the bushes. Patalolo received me lying on the floor, in the dark, all the shutters closed. I could get nothing out of him but lamentations and groans. He said you must be dead. That Lakamba was coming now with Abdulla's guns to kill everybody. Said he did not mind being killed, as he was an old man, but that the wish of his heart was to make a pilgrimage. He was tired of men's ingratitude—he had no heirs—he wanted to go to Mecca and die there. He would ask Abdulla to let him go. Then he abused Lakamba—between sobs—and you, a little. You prevented him from asking for a flag that would have been respected—he was right there—and now when his enemies were strong he was weak, and you were not there to help him. When I tried to put some heart into him, telling him he had four big guns—you know the brass six-pounders you left here last year—and that I would get powder, and that, perhaps, together we could make head against Lakamba, he simply howled at me. No matter which way he turned—he shrieked—the white men would be the death of him, while he wanted only to be a pilgrim and be at peace. My belief is," added Almayer, after a short pause, and fixing a dull stare upon Lingard, "that the old fool saw this thing coming for a long time, and was not only too frightened to do anything himself, but actually too scared to let you or me know of his suspicions. Another of your particular pets! Well! You have a lucky hand, I must say!"

Lingard struck a sudden blow on the table with his clenched hand. There was a sharp crack of splitting wood. Almayer started up violently, then fell back in his chair and looked at the table.

"There!" he said, moodily, "you don't know your own strength. This table is completely ruined. The only table I had been able to save from my wife. By and by I will have to eat squatting on the floor like a native."

Lingard laughed heartily. "Well then, don't nag at me like a woman at a drunken husband!" He became very serious after a while, and added, "If it hadn't been for the loss of the *Flash* I would have been here three months ago, and all would have been well. No use crying over that. Don't you be uneasy, Kaspar. We will have everything ship-shape here in a very short time."

"What? You don't mean to expel Abdulla out of here by force! I tell you, you can't."

"Not I!" exclaimed Lingard. "That's all over, I am afraid. Great pity. They will suffer for it. He will squeeze them. Great pity. Damn it! I feel so sorry for them if I had the *Flash* here I would try force. Eh! Why not? However, the poor *Flash* is gone, and there is an end of it. Poor old hooker. Hey, Almayer? You made a voyage or two with me. Wasn't she a sweet craft? Could make her do anything but talk. She was better than a wife to me. Never scolded. Hey? . . . And to think that it should come to this. That I should leave her poor old bones sticking on a reef as though I had been a damned fool of a southern-going man who must have half a mile of water under his keel to be safe! Well! well! It's only those who do nothing that make no mistakes, I suppose. But it's hard. Hard."

He nodded sadly, with his eyes on the ground. Almayer looked at him with growing indignation.

"Upon my word, you are heartless," he burst out; "perfectly heartless—and selfish. It does not seem to strike you—in all that—that in losing your ship—by your recklessness, I am sure—you ruin me—us, and my little Nina. What's going to become of me and of her? That's what I want to know. You brought me here, made me your partner, and now, when everything is gone to the devil—through your fault, mind you—you talk about your ship . . . ship! You can get another. But here. This trade. That's gone now, thanks to Willems. . . . Your dear Willems!"

"Never you mind about Willems I will look after him," said Lingard severely. "And as to the trade . . . I will make your fortune yet, my boy. Never fear. Have you got any cargo for the schooner that brought me here?"

"The shed is full of rattans," answered Almayer, "and I have about eighty tons of guttah in the well. The last lot I ever will have, no doubt," he added, bitterly.

"So, after all, there was no robbery. You've lost nothing

actually. Well, then, you must . . . Hallo! What's the matter! . . . Here! . . ."

"Robbery! No!" screamed Almayer, throwing up his hands.

He fell back in the chair and his face became purple. A little white foam appeared on his lips and trickled down his chin, while he lay back, showing the whites of his upturned eyes. When he came to himself he saw Lingard standing over him, with an empty water-chatty in his hand.

"You had a fit of some kind," said the old seaman with much concern. "What is it? You did give me a fright. So very sudden."

Almayer, his hair all wet and stuck to his head, as if he had been diving, sat up and gasped.

"Outrage! A fiendish outrage. I . . ."

Lingard put the chatty on the table and looked at him in attentive silence. Almayer passed his hand over his forehead and went on in an unsteady tone:

"When I remember that, I lose all control," he said. "I told you he anchored Abdulla's ship abreast our jetty, but over to the other shore, near the Rajah's place. The ship was surrounded with boats. From here it looked as if she had been landed on a raft. Every dugout in Sambir was there. Through my glass I could distinguish the faces of people on the poop—Abdulla, Willems, Lakamba—everybody. That old cringing scoundrel Sahamin was there. I could see quite plain. There seemed to be much talk and discussion. Finally I saw a ship's boat lowered. Some Arab got into her, and the boat went towards Patalolo's landing-place. It seems they had been refused admittance—so they say. I think myself that the water-gate was not unbarred quick enough to please the exalted messenger. At any rate I saw the boat come back almost directly. I was looking on, rather interested, when I saw Willems and some more go forward—very busy about something there. That woman was also amongst them. Ah, that woman . . ."

Almayer choked, and seemed on the point of having a relapse, but by a violent effort regained a comparative composure.

"All of a sudden," he continued—"bang! They fired a shot into Patalolo's gate, and before I had time to catch my breath—I was startled, you may believe—they sent another and burst the gate open. Whereupon, I suppose, they thought they had done enough for a while, and probably felt hungry, for a feast began aft. Abdulla sat amongst them like an idol, cross-legged, his hands on his lap. He's too great altogether to eat when others do, but he presided, you see. Willems kept on dodging about forward, aloof

from the crowd, and looking at my house through the ship's long glass. I could not resist it. I shook my fist at him."

"Just so," said Lingard, gravely. "That was the thing to do, of course. If you can't fight a man the best thing is to exasperate him."

Almayer waved his hand in a superior manner, and continued, unmoved:

"You may say what you like. You can't realize my feelings. He saw me, and, with his eye still at the small end of the glass, lifted his arm as if answering a hail. I thought my turn to be shot at would come next after Patalolo, so I ran up the Union Jack to the flagstaff in the yard. I had no other protection. There were only three men besides Ali that stuck to me—three cripples, for that matter, too sick to get away. I would have fought single-handed, I think, I was that angry, but there was the child. What to do with her? Couldn't send her up the river with the mother. You know I can't trust my wife. I decided to keep very quiet, but to let nobody land on our shore. Private property, that; under a deed from Patalolo. I was within my right—wasn't I? The morning was very quiet. After they had a feed on board the barque with Abdulla most of them went home; only the big people remained. Towards three o'clock Sahamin crossed alone in a small canoe. I went down on our wharf with my gun to speak to him, but didn't let him land. The old hypocrite said Abdulla sent greetings and wished to talk with me on business; would I come on board? I said no; I would not. Told him that Abdulla may write and I would answer, but no interview, neither on board his ship nor on shore. I also said that if anybody attempted to land within my fences I would shoot—no matter whom. On that he lifted his hands to heaven, scandalized, and then paddled away pretty smartly—to report, I suppose. An hour or so afterwards I saw Willems land a boat party at the Rajah's. It was very quiet. Not a shot was fired, and there was hardly any shouting. They tumbled those brass guns you presented to Patalolo last year down the bank into the river. It's deep there close to. The channel runs that way, you know. About five, Willems went back on board, and I saw him join Abdulla by the wheel aft. He talked a lot, swinging his arms about—seemed to explain things—pointed at my house, then down the reach. Finally, just before sunset, they hove upon the cable and dredged the ship down nearly half a mile to the junction of the two branches of the river—where she is now, as you might have seen."

Lingard nodded.

"That evening, after dark—I was informed—Abdulla landed for the first time in Sambir. He was entertained in Sahamin's

house. I sent Ali to the settlement for news. He returned about nine, and reported that Patalolo was sitting on Abdulla's left hand before Sahamin's fire. There was a great council. Ali seemed to think that Patalolo was a prisoner, but he was wrong there. They did the trick very neatly. Before midnight everything was arranged as I can make out. Patalolo went back to his demolished stockade, escorted by a dozen boats with torches. It appears he begged Abdulla to let him have a passage in the *Lord of the Isles* to Penang. From there he would go to Mecca. The firing business was alluded to as a mistake. No doubt it was in a sense. Patalolo never meant resisting. So he is going as soon as the ship is ready for sea. He went on board next day with three women and half a dozen fellows as old as himself. By Abdulla's orders he was received with a salute of seven guns, and he has been living on board ever since—five weeks. I doubt whether he will leave the river alive. At any rate he won't live to reach Penang. Lakamba took over all his goods, and gave him a draft on Abdulla's house payable in Penang. He is bound to die before he gets there. Don't you see? "

He sat silent for a while in dejected meditation, then went on:

"Of course there were several rows during the night. Various fellows took the opportunity of the unsettled state of affairs to pay off old scores and settle old grudges. I passed the night in that chair there, dozing uneasily. Now and then there would be a great tumult and yelling which would make me sit up, revolver in hand. However, nobody was killed. A few broken heads—that's all. Early in the morning Willems caused them to make a fresh move which I must say surprised me not a little. As soon as there was daylight they busied themselves in setting up a flag-pole on the space at the other end of the settlement, where Abdulla is having his houses built now. Shortly after sunrise there was a great gathering at the flag-pole. All went there. Willems was standing leaning against the mast, one arm over that woman's shoulders. They had brought an armchair for Patalolo, and Lakamba stood on the right hand of the old man, who made a speech. Everybody in Sambir was there: women, slaves, children—everybody! Then Patalolo spoke. He said that by the mercy of the Most High he was going on a pilgrimage. The dearest wish of his heart was to be accomplished. Then, turning to Lakamba, he begged him to rule justly during his—Patalolo's—absence. There was a bit of play-acting there. Lakamba said he was unworthy of the honourable burden, and Patalolo insisted. Poor old fool! It must have been bitter to him. They made him actually entreat that scoundrel. Fancy a man compelled to beg of a robber to despoil him! But the old Rajah was so frightened.

Anyway, he did it, and Lakamba accepted at last. Then Willems made a speech to the crowd. Said that on his way to the west the Rajah—he meant Patalolo—would see the Great White Ruler in Batavia and obtain his protection for Sambir. Meantime, he went on, I, an Orang Blanda and your friend, hoist the flag under the shadow of which there is safety. With that he ran up a Dutch flag to the mast-head. It was made hurriedly, during the night, of cotton stuffs, and, being heavy, hung down the mast, while the crowd stared. Ali told me there was a great sigh of surprise, but not a word was spoken till Lakamba advanced and proclaimed in a loud voice that during all that day every one passing by the flagstaff must uncover his head and salaam before the emblem."

"But hang it all!" exclaimed Lingard—"Abdulla is British!"

"Abdulla wasn't there at all—did not go on shore that day. Yet Ali, who has his wits about him, noticed that the space where the crowd stood was under the guns of the *Lord of the Isles*. They had put a coir warp ashore, and gave the barque a cant in the current, so as to bring the broadside to bear on the flagstaff. Clever! Eh? But nobody dreamt of resistance. When they recovered from the surprise there was a little quiet jeering, and Bahassoen abused Lakamba violently till one of Lakamba's men hit him on the head with a staff. Frightful crack, I am told. Then they left off jeering. Meantime Patalolo went away, and Lakamba sat in the chair at the foot of the flagstaff, while the crowd surged around, as if they could not make up their minds to go. Suddenly there was a great noise behind Lakamba's chair. It was that woman, who went for Willems. Ali says she was like a wild beast, but he twisted her wrist and made her grovel in the dust. Nobody knows exactly what it was about. Some say it was about that flag. He carried her off, flung her into a canoe, and went on board Abdulla's ship. After that Sahamin was the first to salaam to the flag. Others followed suit. Before noon everything was quiet in the settlement, and Ali came back and told me all this."

Almayer drew a long breath. Lingard stretched out his legs.

"Go on!" he said.

Almayer seemed to struggle with himself. At last he spluttered out:

"The hardest is to tell yet. The most unheard-of thing! An outrage! A fiendish outrage!"

"WELL! Let's know all about it. I can't imagine . . ."

began Lingard, after waiting for some time in silence. "Can't imagine! I should think you couldn't," interrupted Almayer. "Why! . . . You just listen. When Ali came back I felt a little easier in my mind. There was then some semblance of order in Sambir. I had the Jack up since the morning and began to feel safer. Some of my men turned up in the afternoon. I did not ask any questions; set them to work as if nothing had happened. Towards the evening—it might have been five or half-past —I was on our jetty with the child when I heard shouts at the far-off end of the settlement. At first I didn't take much notice. By and by Ali came to me and says, 'Master, give me the child, there is much trouble in the settlement.' So I gave him Nina and went in, took my revolver, and passed through the house into the back courtyard. As I came down the steps I saw all the serving girls clear out from the cooking shed, and I heard a big crowd howling on the other side of the dry ditch which is the limit of our ground. Could not see them on account of the fringe of bushes along the ditch but I knew that crowd was angry and after somebody. As I stood wondering, that Jim-Eng—you know the Chinaman who settled here a couple of years ago?"

"He was my passenger; I brought him here," exclaimed Lingard. "A first-class Chinaman that."

"Did you? I had forgotten. Well, that Jim-Eng, he burst through the bush and fell into my arms, so to speak. He told me, panting, that they were after him because he wouldn't take off his hat to the flag. He was not so much scared, but he was very angry and indignant. Of course he had to run for it; there were some fifty men after him—Lakamba's friends—but he was full of fight. Said he was an Englishman, and would not take off his hat to any flag but English. I tried to soothe him while the crowd was shouting on the other side of the ditch. I told him he must take one of my canoes and cross the river. Stop on the other side for a couple of days. He wouldn't. Not he. He was English, and he would fight the whole lot. Says he: 'They are only black fellows. We white men,' meaning me and himself, 'can fight everybody in Sambir.' He was mad with passion. The crowd quieted a little, and I thought I could shelter Jim-Eng without much risk, when all of a sudden I heard Willems' voice. He shouted to me in English: 'Let four men enter your compound to get that Chinaman!' I said nothing. Told Jim-Eng to keep

quiet too. Then after a while Willems shouts again: 'Don't resist, Almayer. I give you good advice. I am keeping this crowd back. Don't resist them!' I cried to him: 'You are a liar!' and just then Jim-Eng, who had flung off his jacket and had tucked up his trousers ready for a fight; just then that fellow he snatches the revolver out of my hand and lets fly at them through the bush. There was a sharp cry—he must have hit somebody—and a great yell, and before I could wink twice they were over the ditch and through the bush and on top of us! Simply rolled over us! There wasn't the slightest chance to resist. I was trampled under foot, Jim-Eng got a dozen gashes about his body, and we were carried halfway up the yard in the first rush. My eyes and mouth were full of dust; I was on my back with three or four fellows sitting on me. I could hear Jim-Eng trying to shout not very far from me. Now and then they would throttle him and he would gurgle. I could hardly breathe myself with two heavy fellows on my chest. Willems came up running and ordered them to raise me up, but to keep good hold. They led me into the verandah. I looked round, but did not see either Ali or the child. Felt easier. Struggled a little. . . . Oh, my God!"

Almayer's face was distorted with a passing spasm of rage. Lingard moved in his chair slightly. Almayer went on after a short pause:

"They held me, shouting threats in my face. Willems took down my hammock and threw it to them. He pulled out the drawer of this table, and found there a palm and needle and some sail-twine. We were making awnings for your brig, as you had asked me last voyage before you left. He knew, of course, where to look for what he wanted. By his orders they laid me out on the floor, wrapped me in my hammock, and he started to stitch me in, as if I had been a corpse, beginning at the feet. While he worked he laughed wickedly. I called him all the names I could think of. He told them to put their dirty paws over my mouth and nose. I was nearly choked. Whenever I moved they punched me in the ribs. He went on taking needlefuls as he wanted them, and working steadily. Sewed me up to my throat. Then he rose, saying, 'That will do; let go.' That woman had been standing by; they must have been reconciled. She clapped her hands. I lay on the floor like a bale of goods while he stared at me, and the woman shrieked with delight. Like a bale of goods! There was a grin on every face, and the verandah was full of them. I wished myself dead—'pon my word, Captain Lingard, I did! I do now whenever I think of it!"

Lingard's face expressed sympathetic indignation. Almayer dropped his head upon his arms on the table, and spoke in that

position in an indistinct and muffled voice, without looking up.

"Finally, by his directions, they flung me into the big rocking-chair. I was sewed in so tight that I was stiff like a piece of wood. He was giving orders in a very loud voice, and that man Babalatchi saw that they were executed. They obeyed him implicitly. Meantime I lay there in the chair like a log, and that woman capered before me and made faces; snapped her fingers before my nose. Women are bad!—ain't they? I never saw her before, as far as I know. Never done anything to her. Yet she was perfectly fiendish. Can you understand it? Now and then she would leave me alone to hang round his neck for a while, and then she would return before my chair and begin her exercises again. He looked on, indulgent. The perspiration ran down my face, got into my eyes—my arms were sewn in. I was blinded half the time; at times I could see better. She drags him before my chair. 'I am like white women,' she says, her arms round his neck. You should have seen the faces of the fellows in the verandah! They were scandalized and ashamed of themselves to see her behaviour. Suddenly she asks him, alluding to me: 'When are you going to kill him?' Imagine how I felt. I must have swooned; I don't remember exactly. I fancy there was a row; he was angry. When I got my wits again he was sitting close to me, and she was gone. I understood he sent her to my wife, who was hiding in the back room and never came out during this affair. Willems says to me—I fancy I can hear his voice, hoarse and dull—he says to me: 'Not a hair of your head shall be touched.' I made no sound. Then he goes on: 'Please remark that the flag you have hoisted—which, by the by, is not yours—has been respected. Tell Captain Lingard so when you do see him. But,' he says, 'you first fired at the crowd,' 'You are a liar, you black-guard!' I shouted. He winced, I am sure. It hurt him to see I was not frightened. 'Anyways,' he says, 'a shot had been fired out of your compound and a man was hit. Still, all your property shall be respected on account of the Union Jack. Moreover, I have no quarrel with Captain Lingard, who is the senior partner in this business. As to you,' he continued, 'you will not forget this day—not if you live to be a hundred years old—or I don't know your nature. You will keep the bitter taste of this humiliation to the last day of your life, and so your kindness to me shall be repaid. I shall remove all the powder you have. This coast is under the protection of the Netherlands, and you have no right to have any powder. There are the Governor's Orders in Council to that effect, and you know it. Tell me where the key of the small storehouse is?' I said not a word, and he waited a little, then rose, saying: 'It's your own fault if there is any damage done.'

He ordered Babalatchi to have the lock of the office-room forced, and went in—rummaged amongst my drawers—could not find the key. Then that woman Aissa asked my wife, and she gave them the key. After a while they tumbled every barrel into the river. Eighty-three hundredweight! He superintended himself, and saw every barrel roll into the water. There were mutterings. Babalatchi was angry and tried to expostulate, but he gave him a good shaking. I must say he was perfectly fearless with those fellows. Then he came back to the verandah, sat down by me again, and says: 'We found your man Ali with your little daughter hiding in the bushes up the river. We brought them in. They are perfectly safe, of course. Let me congratulate you, Almayer, upon the cleverness of your child. She recognized me at once, and cried "pig" as naturally as you would yourself. Circumstances alter feelings. You should have seen how frightened your man Ali was. Clapped his hands over her mouth. I think you spoil her, Almayer. But I am not angry. Really, you look so ridiculous in this chair that I can't feel angry.' I made a frantic effort to burst out of my hammock to get at that scoundrel's throat, but I only fell off and upset the chair over myself. He laughed and said only: 'I leave you half of your revolver cartridges and take half myself; they will fit mine. We are both white men, and should back each other up. I may want them.' I shouted at him from under the chair: 'You are a thief,' but he never looked, and went away, one hand round that woman's waist, the other on Babalatchi's shoulder, to whom he was talking—laying down the law about something or other. In less than five minutes there was nobody inside our fences. After a while Ali came to look for me and cut me free. I haven't seen Willems since—nor anybody else for that matter. I have been left alone. I offered sixty dollars to the man who had been wounded, which were accepted. They released Jim-Eng the next day, when the flag had been hauled down. He sent six cases of opium to me for safe keeping but has not left his house. I think he is safe enough now. Everything is very quiet."

Towards the end of his narrative Almayer lifted his head off the table, and now sat back in his chair and stared at the bamboo rafters of the roof above him. Lingard lolled in his seat with his legs stretched out. In the peaceful gloom of the verandah, with its lowered screens, they heard faint noises from the world outside in the blazing sunshine: a hail on the river, the answer from the shore, the creak of a pulley; sounds short, interrupted, as if lost suddenly in the brilliance of noonday. Lingard got up slowly, walked to the front rail, and holding one of the screens aside, looked out in silence. Over the water and the empty courtyard

came a distinct voice from a small schooner anchored abreast of the Lingard jetty.

"Scrang! Take a pull at the main peak halyards. This gaff is down on the boom."

There was a shrill pipe dying in long-drawn cadence, the song of the men swinging on the rope. The voice said sharply: "That will do!" Another voice—the serang's probably—shouted: "Ikat!" and as Lingard dropped the blind and turned away all was silent again, as if there had been nothing on the other side of the swaying screen; nothing but the light, brilliant, crude, heavy, lying on a dead land like a pall of fire. Lingard sat down again, facing Almayer, his elbow on the table, in a thoughtful attitude.

"Nice little schooner," muttered Almayer, wearily. "Did you buy her?"

"No," answered Lingard. "After I lost the *Flash* we got to Palembang in our boats. I chartered her there, for six months. From young Ford, you know. Belongs to him. He wanted a spell ashore, so I took charge myself. Of course all Ford's people on board. Strangers to me. I had to go to Singapore about the insurance; then I went to Macassar, of course. Had long passages. No wind. It was like a curse on me. I had lots of trouble with old Hudig. That delayed me much."

"Ah! Why with Hudig?" asked Almayer, in a perfunctory manner.

"Oh! about a . . . a woman," mumbled Lingard.

Almayer looked at him with languid surprise. The old seaman had twisted his white beard into a point, and now was busy giving his moustaches a fierce curl. His little red eyes—those eyes that had smarted under the salt sprays of every sea, that had looked unwinking to windward in the gales of all latitudes—now glared at Almayer from behind the lowered eyebrows like a pair of frightened wild beasts crouching in a bush.

"Extraordinary! So like you! What can you have to do with Hudig's women? The old sinner!" said Almayer negligently.

"What are you talking about! Wife of a friend of . . . I mean of a man I know . . ."

"Still, I don't see . . ." interjected Almayer carelessly.

"Of a man you know too. Well. Very well."

"I knew so many men before you made me bury myself in this hole!" growled Almayer, unamiably. "If she had anything to do with Hudig—that wife—then she can't be up to much. I would be sorry for the man," added Almayer, brightening up with the recollection of the scandalous tittle-tattle of the past, when he was a young man in the second capital of the Islands—

and so well informed, so well informed. He laughed. Lingard's frown deepened.

"Don't talk foolish! It's Willems' wife."

Almayer grasped the sides of his seat, his eyes and mouth opened wide.

"What? Why!" he exclaimed, bewildered.

"Willems'—wife," repeated Lingard distinctly. "You ain't deaf, are you? The wife of Willems. Just so. As to why! There was a promise. And I did not know what had happened here."

"What is it. You've been giving her money, I bet," cried Almayer.

"Well, no!" said Lingard, deliberately. "Although I suppose I shall have to . . ."

Almayer groaned.

"The fact is," went on Lingard, speaking slowly and steadily, "the fact is that I have . . . I have brought her here. Here. To Sambir."

"In heaven's name! Why?" shouted Almayer, jumping up. The chair tilted and fell slowly over. He raised his clasped hands above his head and brought them down jerkily, separating his fingers with an effort, as if tearing them apart. Lingard nodded, quickly, several times.

"I have. Awkward. Hey?" he said, with a puzzled look upwards.

"Upon my word," said Almayer, tearfully. "I can't understand you at all. What will you do next! Willems' wife!"

"Wife and child. Small boy, you know. They are on board the schooner."

Almayer looked at Lingard with sudden suspicion, then turning away busied himself in picking up the chair, sat down in it turning his back upon the old seaman, and tried to whistle, but gave it up directly. Lingard went on—

"Fact is, the fellow got into trouble with Hudig. Worked upon my feelings. I promised to arrange matters. I did. With much trouble. Hudig was angry with her for wishing to join her husband. Unprincipled old fellow. You know she is his daughter. Well, I said I would see her through it all right; help Willems to a fresh start and so on. I spoke to Craig in Palembang. He is getting on in years, and wanted a manager or partner. I promised to guarantee Willems' good behaviour. We settled all that. Craig is an old crony of mine. Been shipmates in the forties. He's waiting for him now. A pretty mess! What do you think?"

Almayer shrugged his shoulders.

"That woman broke with Hudig on my assurance that all

would be well," went on Lingard, with growing dismay. "She did. Proper thing, of course. Wife, husband . . . together . . . as it should be . . . Smart fellow . . . Impossible scoundrel . . . Jolly old go! Oh! damn!"

Almayer laughed spitefully.

"How delighted he will be," he said, softly. "You will make two people happy. Two at least!" He laughed again, while Lingard looked at his shaking shoulders in consternation.

"I am jammed on a lee shore this time, if ever I was," muttered Lingard.

"Send her back quick," suggested Almayer, stifling another laugh.

"What are you sniggering at?" growled Lingard, angrily. "I'll work it out all clear yet. Meantime you must receive her into this house."

"My house!" cried Almayer, turning round.

"It's mine too—a little— isn't it?" said Lingard. "Don't argue," he shouted, as Almayer opened his mouth. "Obey orders and hold your tongue!"

"Oh! If you take it in that tone!" mumbled Almayer, sulkily, with a gesture of assent.

"You are so aggravating too, my boy," said the old seaman, with unexpected placidity. "You must give me time to turn round. I can't keep her on board all the time. I must tell her something. Say, for instance, that he is gone up the river. Expected back every day. That's it. D'ye hear? You must put her on that tack and dodge her along easy, while I take the kinks out of the situation. By God!" he exclaimed, mournfully, after a short pause, "life is foul! Foul like a lee forebrace on a dirty night. And yet. And yet. One must see it clear for running before going below—for good. Now you attend to what I said," he added, sharply, "if you don't want to quarrel with me, my boy."

"I don't want to quarrel with you," murmured Almayer with unwilling deference. "Only I wish I could understand you. I know you are my best friend, Captain Lingard; only, upon my word, I can't make you out sometimes! I wish I could . . ."

Lingard burst into a loud laugh which ended shortly in a deep sigh. He closed his eyes, tilting his head over the back of his armchair; and on his face, baked by the unclouded suns of many hard years, there appeared for a moment a weariness and a look of age which startled Almayer, like an unexpected disclosure of evil.

"I am done up," said Lingard, gently. "Perfectly done up. All night on deck getting that schooner up the river. Then

talking with you. Seems to me I could go to sleep on a clothes-line. I should like to eat something though. Just see about that, Kaspar."

Almayer clapped his hands, and receiving no response was going to call, when in the central passage of the house, behind the red curtain of the doorway opening upon the verandah, they heard a child's imperious voice speaking shrilly.

"Take me up at once. I want to be carried into the verandah. I shall be very angry. Take me up."

A man's voice answered, subdued, in humble remonstrance. The faces of Almayer and Lingard brightened at once. The old seaman called out—

"Bring the child. Leka!"

"You will see how she has grown," exclaimed Almayer, in a jubilant tone.

Through the curtained doorway Ali appeared with little Nina Almayer in his arms. The child had one arm round his neck, and with the other she hugged a ripe pumelo nearly as big as her own head. Her little pink, sleeveless robe had half slipped off her shoulders, but the long black hair, that framed her olive face, in which the big black eyes looked out in childish solemnity, fell in luxuriant profusion over her shoulders all round her and over Ali's arms, like a close-meshed and delicate net of silken threads. Lingard got up to meet Ali, and as soon as she caught sight of the old seaman she dropped the fruit and put out both her hands with a cry of delight. He took her from the Malay, and she laid hold of his moustaches with an affectionate goodwill that brought unaccustomed tears into his little red eyes.

"Not so hard, little one, not so hard," he murmured, pressing with an enormous hand, that covered it entirely, the child's head to his face.

"Pick up my pumelo, O Rajah of the sea!" she said, speaking in a high-pitched, clear voice with great volubility. "There, under the table. I want it quick! Quick! You have been away fighting with many men. Ali says so. You are a mighty fighter. Ali says so. On the great sea far away, away, away."

She waved her hand, staring with dreamy vacancy, while Lingard looked at her, and squatting down groped under the table after the pumelo.

"Where does she get those notions?" said Lingard, getting up cautiously, to Almayer, who had been giving orders to Ali.

"She is always with the men. Many a time I've found her with her fingers in their rice dish, of an evening. She does not care for her mother though—I am glad to say. How pretty she is—and so sharp. My very image!"

Lingard had put the child on the table, and both men stood looking at her with radiant faces.

"A perfect little woman," whispered Lingard. "Yes, my dear boy, we shall make her somebody. You'll see!"

"Very little chance of that now," remarked Almayer, sadly.

"You do not know!" exclaimed Lingard, taking up the child again, and beginning to walk up and down the verandah. "I have my plans. I have—listen."

And he began to explain to the interested Almayer his plans for the future. He would interview Abdulla and Lakamba. There must be some understanding with those fellows now they had the upper hand. Here he interrupted himself to swear freely, while the child, who had been diligently fumbling about his neck, had found his whistle and blew a loud blast now and then close to his ear—which made him wince and laugh as he put her hands down, scolding her lovingly. Yes—that would be easily settled. He was a man to be reckoned with yet. Nobody knew that better than Almayer. Very well. Then he must patiently try and keep some little trade together. It would be all right. But the great thing—and here Lingard spoke lower, bringing himself to a sudden standstill before the entranced Almayer—the great thing would be the gold hunt up the river. He—Lingard—would devote himself to it. He had been in the interior before. There were immense deposits of alluvial gold there. Fabulous. He felt sure. Had seen places. Dangerous work? Of course! But what a reward! He would explore—and find. Not a shadow of doubt. Hang the danger! They would first get as much as they could for themselves. Keep the thing quiet. Then after a time form a Company. In Batavia or in England. Yes, in England. Much better. Splendid! Why, of course. And that baby would be the richest woman in the world. He—Lingard—would not, perhaps, see it—although he felt good for many years yet—but Almayer would. Here was something to live for yet! Hey?

But the richest woman in the world had been for the last five minutes shouting shrilly—"Rajah Laut! Rajah Laut! Hai! Give ear!" while the old seaman had been speaking louder, unconsciously, to make his deep bass heard above the impatient clamour.

He stopped now and said tenderly—

"What is it, little woman?"

"I am not a little woman. I am a white child. Anak Putih. A white child; and the white men are my brothers. Father says so. And Ali says so too. Ali knows as much as father. Everything."

Almayer almost danced with paternal delight.

"I taught her. I taught her," he repeated, laughing with tears in his eyes. "Isn't she sharp?"

"I am the slave of the white child," said Lingard, with playful solemnity. "What is the order?"

"I want a house," she warbled, with great eagerness. "I want a house, and another house on the roof, and another on the roof—high. High! Like the places where they dwell—my brothers—in the land where the sun sleeps."

"To the westward," explained Almayer, under his breath. "She remembers everything. She wants you to build a house of cards. You did, last time you were here."

Lingard sat down with the child on his knees and Almayer pulled out violently one drawer after another, looking for the cards, as if the fate of the world depended upon his haste. He produced a dirty double pack which was only used during Lingard's visit to Sambir, when he would sometimes play—of an evening—with Almayer, a game which he called Chinese bezique. It bored Almayer, but the old seaman delighted in it, considering it a remarkable product of Chinese genius—a race for which he had an unaccountable liking and admiration.

"Now we will get on, my little pearl," he said, putting together with extreme precaution two cards that looked absurdly flimsy between his big fingers. Little Nina watched him with intense seriousness as he went on erecting the ground floor, while he continued to speak to Almayer with his head over his shoulder so as not to endanger the structure with his breath.

"I know what I am talking about. . . . Been in California in forty-nine. . . . Not that I made much . . . then in Victoria in the early days. . . . I know all about it. Trust me. Moreover a blind man could . . . Be quiet, little sister, or you will knock this affair down. . . . My hand pretty steady yet! Hey, Kaspar? . . . Now, delight of my heart, we shall put a third house on the top of these two . . . keep very quiet. . . . As I was saying, you got only to stoop and gather handfuls of gold . . . dust . . . there. Now here we are. Three houses on top of one another. Grand!"

He leaned back in his chair, one hand on the child's head, which he smoothed mechanically, and gesticulated with the other, speaking to Almayer.

"Once on the spot, there would be only the trouble to pick up the stuff. Then we shall all go to Europe. The child must be educated. We shall be rich. Rich is no name for it. Down in Devonshire where I belong, there was a fellow who built a house near Teignmouth which had as many windows as a three-decker has ports. Made all his money somewhere out here in the

good old days. People around said he had been a pirate. We boys—I was a boy in a Brixham trawler then—certainly believed that. He went about in a bath-chair in his grounds. Had a glass eye . . .”

“Higher! Higher!” called out Nina, pulling the old seaman’s beard.

“You do worry me—don’t you?” said Lingard, gently, giving her a tender kiss. “What? One more house on top of all these? Well! I will try.”

The child watched him breathlessly. When the difficult feat was accomplished she clapped her hands, looked on steadily, and after a while gave a great sigh of content.

“Oh! Look out!” shouted Almayer.

The structure collapsed suddenly before the child’s light breath. Lingard looked discomposed for a moment. Almayer laughed, but the little girl began to cry.

“Take her,” said the old seaman, abruptly. Then, after Almayer went away with the crying child, he remained sitting by the table, looking gloomily at the heap of cards.

“Damn this Willerns,” he muttered to himself. “But I will do it yet!”

He got up, and with an angry push of his hand swept the cards off the table. Then he fell back in his chair.

“Tired as a dog,” he sighed out, closing his eyes.

17

CONSCIOUSLY or unconsciously, men are proud of their firmness, steadfastness of purpose, directness of aim. They go straight towards their desire, to the accomplishment of virtue—sometimes of crime—in an uplifting persuasion of their firmness. They walk the road of life, the road fenced in by their tastes, prejudices, disdains or enthusiasms, generally honest, invariably stupid, and are proud of never losing their way. If they do stop, it is to look for a moment over the hedges that make them safe, to look at the misty valleys, at the distant peaks, at cliffs and morasses, at the dark forests and the hazy plains where other human beings grope their days painfully away, stumbling over the bones of the wise, over the unburied remains of their predecessors who died alone, in gloom or in sunshine, halfway from anywhere. The man of purpose does not understand, and goes on, full of contempt. He never loses his way. He knows where he is going and what he wants. Travelling on, he achieves great length without any

breadth, and battered, besmirched, and weary, he touches the goal at last; he grasps the reward of his perseverance, of his virtue, of his healthy optimism: an untruthful tombstone over a dark and soon forgotten grave.

Lingard had never hesitated in his life. Why should he? He had been a most successful trader, and a man lucky in his fights, skilful in navigation, undeniably first in seamanship in those seas. He knew it. Had he not heard the voice of common consent? The voice of the world that respected him so much; the whole world to him—for to us the limits of the universe are strictly defined by those we know. There is nothing for us outside the babble of praise and blame on familiar lips, and beyond our last acquaintance there lies only a vast chaos; a chaos of laughter and tears which concerns us not; laughter and tears unpleasant, wicked, morbid, contemptible—because heard imperfectly by ears rebellious to strange sounds. To Lingard—simple himself—all things were simple. He seldom read. Books were not much in his way, and he had to work hard navigating, trading, and also, in obedience to his benevolent instincts, shaping stray lives he found here and there under his busy hand. He remembered the Sunday-school teachings of his native village and the discourses of the black-coated gentleman connected with the Mission to Fishermen and Seamen, whose yawl-rigged boat darting through rain-squalls amongst the coasters wind-bound in Falmouth Bay, was part of those precious pictures of his youthful days that lingered in his memory. “As clever a sky-pilot as you could wish to see,” he would say with conviction, “and the best man to handle a boat in any weather I ever did meet!” Such were the agencies that had roughly shaped his young soul before he went away to see the world in a southern-going ship—before he went, ignorant and happy, heavy of hand, pure in heart, profane in speech, to give himself up to the great sea that took his life and gave him his fortune. When thinking of his rise in the world—commander of ships, then shipowner, then a man of much capital, respected wherever he went, Lingard in a word, the Rajah Laut—he was amazed and awed by his fate, that seemed to his ill-informed mind the most wondrous known in the annals of men. His experience appeared to him immense and conclusive, teaching him the lesson of the simplicity of life. In life—as in seamanship—there were only two ways of doing a thing: the right way and the wrong way. Common sense and experience taught a man the way that was right. The other was for lubbers and fools, and led, in seamanship, to loss of spars and sails or shipwreck; in life, to loss of money and consideration, or to an unlucky knock on the head. He did not consider it his

duty to be angry with rascals. He was only angry with things he could not understand, but for the weaknesses of humanity he could find a contemptuous tolerance. It being manifest that he was wise and lucky—otherwise how could he have been as successful in life as he had been?—he had an inclination to set right the lives of other people, just as he could hardly refrain—in defiance of nautical etiquette—from interfering with his chief officer when the crew was sending up a new topmast, or generally when busy about, what he called, “a heavy job.” He was meddlesome with perfect modesty; if he knew a thing or two there was no merit in it. “Hard knocks taught me wisdom, my boy,” he used to say, “and you had better take the advice of a man who has been a fool in his time. Have another.” And “my boy” as a rule took the cool drink, the advice, and the consequent help which Lingard felt himself bound in honour to give, so as to back up his opinion like an honest man. Captain Tom went sailing from island to island, appearing unexpectedly in various localities, beaming, noisy, anecdotal, commendatory or comminatory, but always welcome.

It was only since his return to Sambir that the old seaman had for the first time known doubt and unhappiness. The loss of the *Flash*—planted firmly and for ever on a ledge of rock at the north end of Gaspar Straits in the uncertain light of a cloudy morning shook him considerably; and the amazing news which he heard on his arrival in Sambir was not made to soothe his feelings. A good many years ago—prompted by his love of adventure—he, with infinite trouble, had found out and surveyed—for his own benefit only—the entrances to that river, where, he had heard through native report, a new settlement of Malays was forming. No doubt he thought at the time mostly of personal gain; but, received with hearty friendliness by Patalolo, he soon came to like the ruler and the people, offered his counsel and his help, and—knowing nothing of Arcadia—he dreamed of Arcadian happiness for that little corner of the world which he loved to think all his own. His deep-seated and immovable conviction that only he—he, Lingard—knew what was good for them was characteristic of him, and, after all, not so very far wrong. He would make them happy whether or no, he said, and he meant it. His trade brought prosperity to the young state, and the fear of his heavy hand secured its internal peace for many years.

He looked proudly upon his work. With every passing year he loved more the land, the people, the muddy river that, if he could help it, would carry no other craft but the *Flash* on its unclean and friendly surface. As he slowly warped his vessel up-

stream he would scan with knowing looks the riverside clearings, and pronounce solemn judgment upon the prospects of the season's rice-crop. He knew every settler on the banks between the sea and Sambir; he knew their wives, their children; he knew every individual of the multi-coloured groups that, standing on the flimsy platforms of tiny reed dwellings built over the water, waved their hands and shouted shrilly: "O! Kapal layer! Hai!" while the *Flash* swept slowly through the populated reach, to enter the lonely stretches of sparkling brown water bordered by the dense and silent forest, whose big trees nodded their outspread boughs gently in the faint, warm breeze—as if in sign of tender but melancholy welcome. He loved it all: the landscape of brown golds and brilliant emeralds under the dome of hot sapphire; the whispering big trees; the loquacious nipa-palms that rattled their leaves volubly in the night breeze, as if in haste to tell him all the secrets of the great forest behind them. He loved the heavy scents of blossoms and black earth, that breath of life and of death which lingered over his brig in the damp air of tepid and peaceful nights. He loved the narrow and sombre creeks, strangers to sunshine: black, smooth, tortuous—like byways of despair. He liked even the troops of sorrowful-faced monkeys that profaned the quiet spots with capricious gambols and insane gestures of inhuman madness. He loved everything there, animated or inanimated; the very mud of the riverside; the very alligators, enormous and stolid, basking on it with impertinent unconcern. Their size was a source of pride to him. "Immense fellows! Make two of them Palembang reptiles! I tell you, old man!" he would shout, poking some crony of his playfully in the ribs: "I tell you, big as you are, they could swallow you in one gulp, hat, boots and all! Magnificent beggars! Wouldn't you like to see them? Wouldn't you! Ha! ha! ha!" His thunderous laughter filled the verandah, rolled over the hotel garden, overflowed into the street, paralyzing for a short moment the noiseless traffic of bare brown feet; and its loud reverberations would ever startle the landlord's tame bird—a shameless mynah—into a momentary propriety of behaviour under the nearest chair. In the big billiard-room perspiring men in thin cotton singlets would stop the game, listen, cue in hand, for a while through the open windows, then nod their moist faces at each other sagaciously and whisper: "The old fellow is talking about his river."

His river! The whispers of curious men, the mystery of the thing, were to Lingard a source of never-ending delight. The common talk of ignorance exaggerated the profits of his queer monopoly, and, although strictly truthful in general, he liked,

on that matter, to mislead speculation still further by boasts full of cold raillery. His river! By it he was not only rich—he was interesting. This secret of his which made him different to the other traders of those seas gave intimate satisfaction to that desire for singularity which he shared with the rest of mankind, without being aware of its presence within his breast. It was the greater part of his happiness, but he only knew it after its loss, so unforeseen, so sudden and so cruel.

After his conversation with Almayer he went on board the schooner, sent Joanna on shore, and shut himself up in his cabin, feeling very unwell. He made the most of his indisposition to Almayer, who came to visit him twice a day. It was an excuse for doing nothing just yet. He wanted to think. He was very angry. Angry with himself, with Willems. Angry at what Willems had done—and also angry at what he had left undone. The scoundrel was not complete. The conception was perfect, but the execution, unaccountably, fell short. Why? He ought to have cut Almayer's throat and burnt the place to ashes—then cleared out. Got out of his way; of him, Lingard! Yet he didn't. Was it impudence, contempt—or what? He felt hurt at the implied disrespect of his power, and the incomplete rascality of the proceeding disturbed him exceedingly. There was something short, something wanting, something that would have given him a free hand in the work of retribution. The obvious, the right thing to do, was to shoot Willems. Yet how could he? Had the fellow resisted, showed fight, or ran away; had he shown any consciousness of harm done, it would have been more possible, more natural. But no! The fellow actually had sent him a message. Wanted to see him. What for? The thing could not be explained. An unexampled, cold-blooded treachery, awful, incomprehensible. Why did he do it? Why? Why? The old seaman in the stuffy solitude of his little cabin on board the schooner groaned out many times that question, striking with an open palm his perplexed forehead.

During his four days of seclusion he had received two messages from the outer world; from that world of Sambir which had, so suddenly and so finally, slipped from his grasp. One, a few words from Willems written on a torn-out page of a small note book; the other, a communication from Abdulla caligraphed carefully on a large sheet of flimsy paper and delivered to him in a green silk wrapper. The first he could not understand. It said: "Come and see me. I am not afraid. Are you? W." He tore it up angrily, but before the small bits of dirty paper had the time to flutter down and settle on the floor, the anger was gone and was replaced by a sentiment that induced him to go on his knees, pick up the

fragments of the torn message, piece it together on the top of his chronometer box, and contemplate it long and thoughtfully, as if he had hoped to read the answer of the horrible riddle in the very form of the letters that went to make up that fresh insult. Abdulla's letter he read carefully and rammed it into his pocket, also with anger, but with anger that ended in a half-resigned, half-amused smile. He would never give in as long as there was a chance. "It's generally the safest way to stick to the ship as long as she will swim," was one of his favourite sayings; "The safest and the right way. To abandon a craft because it leaks is easy—but poor work. Poor work!" Yet he was intelligent enough to know when he was beaten, and to accept the situation like a man, without repining. When Almayer came on board that afternoon he handed him the letter without comment.

Almayer read it, returned it in silence, and leaning over the taffrail (the two men were on deck) looked down for some time at the play of the eddies round the schooner's rudder. At last he said without looking up—

"That's a decent enough letter. Abdulla gives him up to you. I told you they were getting sick of him. What are you going to do?"

Lingard cleared his throat, shuffled his feet, opened his mouth with great determination, but said nothing for a while. At last he murmured—

"I'll be hanged if I know—just yet."

"I wish you would do something soon . . ."

"What's the hurry?" interrupted Lingard. "He can't get away. As it stands he is at my mercy, as far as I can see."

"Yes," said Almayer, reflectively—"and very little mercy he deserves too. Abdulla's meaning—as I can make it out amongst all those compliments—is: 'Get rid for me of that white man—and we shall live in peace and share the trade.'"

"You believe that?" asked Lingard, contemptuously.

"Not altogether," answered Almayer. "No doubt we will share the trade for a time—till he can grab the lot. Well, what are you going to do?"

He looked up as he spoke and was surprised to see Lingard's discomposed face.

"You ain't well. Pain anywhere?" he asked, with real solicitude.

"I have been queer—you know—these last few days, but no pain." He struck his broad chest several times, cleared his throat with a powerful "Hem!" and repeated: "No. No pain. Good for a few years yet. But I am bothered with all this, I can tell you!"

"You must take care of yourself," said Almayer. Then after a pause he added. "You will see Abdulla. Won't you?"

"I don't know. Not yet. There's plenty of time," said Lingard, impatiently.

"I wish you would do something," urged Almayer, moodily. "You know that woman is a perfect nuisance to me. She and her brat! Yelps all day. And the children don't get on together. Yesterday the little devil wanted to fight with my Nina. Scratched her face, too. A perfect savage! Like his honourable papa. Yes, really. She worries about her husband, and whimpers from morning to night. When she isn't weeping she is furious with me. Yesterday she tormented me to tell her when he would be back and cried because he was engaged in such dangerous work. I said something about it being all right—no necessity to make a fool of herself, when she turned upon me like a wild cat. Called me a brute, selfish, heartless; raved about her beloved Peter risking his life for my benefit, while I did not care. Said I took advantage of his generous good-nature to get him to do dangerous work—my work. That he was worth twenty of the likes of me. That she would tell you—open your eyes as to the kind of man I was, and so on. That's what I've got to put up with for your sake. You really might consider me a little. I haven't robbed anybody," went on Almayer, with an attempt at bitter irony—"or sold my best friend, but still you ought to have some pity on me. It's like living in a hot fever. She is out of her wits. You make my house a refuge for scoundrels and lunatics. It isn't fair. 'Pon my word it isn't! When she is in her tantrums she is ridiculously ugly and screeches so—it sets my teeth on edge. Thank God! my wife got a fit of the sulks and cleared out of the house. Lives in a riverside hut since that affair—you know. But this Willems' wife by herself is almost more than I can bear. And I ask myself why should I? You are exacting and no mistake. This morning I thought she was going to claw me. Only think! She wanted to go prancing about the settlement. She might have heard something there, so I told her she mustn't. It wasn't safe outside our fences, I said. Thereupon she rushes at me with her ten nails up to my eyes. 'You miserable man,' she yells, 'even this place is not safe, and you've sent him up this awful river where he may lose his head. If he dies before forgiving me, Heaven will punish you for your crime . . .' My crime! I ask myself sometimes whether I am dreaming! It will make me ill, all this. I've lost my appetite already."

He flung his hat on deck and laid hold of his hair despairingly. Lingard looked at him with concern.

"What did she mean by it?" he muttered, thoughtfully.

"Mean! She is crazy, I tell you—and I will be, very soon, if this lasts!"

"Just a little patience, Kaspar," pleaded Lingard. "A day or so more."

Relieved or tired by his violent outburst, Almayer calmed down, picked up his hat and, leaning against the bulwark, commenced to fan himself with it.

"Days do pass," he said, resignedly—"but that kind of thing makes a man old before his time. What is there to think about? --I can't imagine! Abdulla says plainly that if you undertake to pilot his ship out and instruct the half-caste, he will drop Willems like a hot potato and be your friend ever after. I believe him perfectly, as to Willems. It's so natural. As to being your friend it's a lie of course, but we need not bother about that just yet. You just say yes to Abdulla, and then whatever happens to Willems will be nobody's business."

He interrupted himself and remained silent for a while, glaring about with set teeth and dilated nostrils.

"You leave it to me. I'll see to it that something happens to him," he said at last, with calm ferocity. Lingard smiled faintly.

"The fellow isn't worth a shot. Not the trouble of it," he whispered, as if to himself. Almayer fired up suddenly.

"That's what you think," he cried. "You haven't been sewn up in your hammock to be made a laughing stock of before a parcel of savages. Why! I daren't look anybody here in the face while that scoundrel is alive. I will . . . I will settle him."

"I don't think you will," growled Lingard.

"Do you think I am afraid of him?"

"Bless you! no!" said Lingard with alacrity. "Afraid! Not you. I know you. I don't doubt your courage. It's your head, my boy, your head that I . . ."

"That's it," said the aggrieved Almayer. "Go on. Why don't you call me a fool at once?"

"Because I don't want to," burst out Lingard, with nervous irritability. "If I wanted to call you a fool, I would do so without asking your leave." He began to walk athwart the narrow quarter-deck, kicking ropes' ends out of his way and growling to himself: "Delicate gentleman . . . what next? . . . I've done man's work before you could toddle. Understand . . . say what I like."

"Well! well!" said Almayer, with affected resignation. "There's no talking to you these last few days." He put on his hat, strolled to the gangway and stopped, one foot on the little inside ladder, as if hesitating, came back and planted himself in Lingard's way, compelling him to stand still and listen.

"Of course you will do what you like. You never take advice—I know that; but let me tell you that it wouldn't be honest to let that fellow get away from here. If you do nothing, that scoundrel will leave in Abdulla's ship for sure. Abdulla will make use of him to hurt you and others elsewhere. Willems knows too much about your affairs. He will cause you lots of trouble. You mark my words. Lots of trouble. To you—and to others perhaps. Think of that, Captain Lingard. That's all I've got to say. Now I must go back on shore. There's lots of work. We will begin loading this schooner to-morrow morning, first thing. All the bundles are ready. If you should want me for anything, hoist some kind of flag on the mainmast. At night two shots will fetch me." Then he added, in a friendly tone, "Won't you come and dine in the house to-night? It can't be good for you to stew on board like that, day after day."

Lingard did not answer. The image evoked by Almayer; the picture of Willems ranging over the islands and disturbing the harmony of the universe by robbery, treachery, and violence, held him silent, entranced—painfully spellbound. Almayer, after waiting for a little while, moved reluctantly towards the gangway, lingered there, then sighed and got over the side, going down step by step. His head disappeared slowly below the rail. Lingard, who had been staring at him absently, started suddenly, ran to the side, and looking over, called out—

"Hey! Kaspar! Hold on a bit!"

Almayer signed to his boatmen to cease paddling, and turned his head towards the schooner. The boat drifted back slowly abreast of Lingard, nearly alongside.

"Look here," said Lingard, looking down—"I want a good canoc with four men to-day."

"Do you want it now?" asked Almayer.

"No! Catch this rope. Oh, you clumsy devil! . . . No, Kaspar," went on Lingard, after the bowman had got hold of the end of the brace he had thrown down into the canoe—"No, Kaspar. The sun is too much for me. And it would be better to keep my affairs quiet, too. Send the canoe—four good paddlers, mind, and your canvas chair for me to sit in. Send it about sunset. D'ye hear?"

"All right, father," said Almayer, cheerfully—"I will send Ali for a steersman, and the best men I've got. Anything else?"

"No, my lad. Only don't let them be late."

"I suppose it's no use asking you where you are going," said Almayer, tentatively. "Because if it is to see Abdulla, I . . ."

"I am not going to see Abdulla. Not to-day. Now be off with you."

He watched the canoe dart away shorewards, waved his hand in response to Almayer's nod, and walked to the taffrail smoothing out Abdulla's letter, which he had pulled out of his pocket. He read it over carefully, crumpled it up slowly, smiling the while and closing his fingers firmly over the crackling paper as though he had hold there of Abdulla's throat. Halfway to his pocket he changed his mind, and flinging the ball overboard looked at it thoughtfully as it spun round in the eddies for a moment before the current bore it away down-stream, towards the sea.

PART FOUR

18

THE night was very dark. For the first time in many months the East Coast slept unseen by the stars under a veil of motionless cloud that, driven before the first breath of the rainy monsoon, had drifted slowly from the eastward all the afternoon; pursuing the declining sun with its masses of black and grey that seemed to chase the light with wicked intent, and with an ominous and gloomy steadiness, as though conscious of the message of violence and turmoil they carried. At the sun's disappearance below the western horizon, the immense cloud, in quickened motion, grappled with the glow of retreating light, and rolling down to the clear and jagged outline of the distant mountains, hung arrested above the steaming forests; hanging low, silent and menacing over the unstirring tree-tops; withholding the blessing of rain, nursing the wrath of its thunder; undecided—as if brooding over its own power for good or for evil.

Babalatchi, coming out of the red and smoky light of his little bamboo house, glanced upwards, drew in a long breath of the warm and stagnant air, and stood for a moment with his good eye closed tightly, as if intimidated by the unwonted and deep silence of Lakamba's courtyard. When he opened his eye he had recovered his sight so far, that he could distinguish the various degrees of formless blackness which marked the places of trees, of abandoned houses, of riverside bushes, on the dark background of the night. The careworn sage walked cautiously down the deserted courtyard to the waterside, and stood on the bank listening to the voice of the invisible river that flowed at his feet; listening to the soft whispers, to the deep murmurs, to the sudden gurgles and the short hisses of the swift current racing along the bank through the hot darkness.

He stood with his face turned to the river, and it seemed to him that he could breathe easier with the knowledge of the clear vast space before him; then, after a while he leaned heavily forward on his staff, his chin fell on his breast, and a deep sigh was his answer to the selfish discourse of the river that hurried on unceasing and fast, regardless of joy or sorrow, of suffering and of strife, of failures and triumphs that lived on its banks. The brown water was there, ready to carry friends or enemies,

to nurse love or hate on its submissive and heartless bosom, to help or to hinder, to save life or give death; the great and rapid river: a deliverance, a prison, a refuge or a grave.

Perchance such thoughts as these caused Babalatchi to send another mournful sigh into the trailing mists of the unconcerned Pantai. The barbarous politician had forgotten the recent success of his plottings in the melancholy contemplation of a sorrow that made the night blacker, the clammy heat more oppressive, the still air more heavy, the dumb solitude more significant of torment than of peace. He had spent the night before by the side of the dying Omar, and now, after twenty-four hours, his memory persisted in returning to that low and sombre reed hut from which the fierce spirit of the incomparably accomplished pirate took its flight, to learn too late, in a worse world, the error of its earthly ways. The mind of the savage statesman, chastened by bereavement, felt for a moment the weight of his loneliness with keen perception worthy even of a sensibility exasperated by all the refinements of tender sentiment that a glorious civilization brings in its train, among other blessings and virtues, into this excellent world. For the space of about thirty seconds, a half-naked, betel-chewing pessimist stood upon the bank of the tropical river, on the edge of the still and immense forests; a man angry, powerless, empty-handed, with a cry of bitter discontent ready on his lips; a cry that, had it come out, would have rung through the virgin solitudes of the woods, as true, as great, as profound, as any philosophical shriek that ever came from the depths of an easy-chair to disturb the impure wilderness of chimneys and roofs.

For half a minute and no more did Babalatchi face the gods in the sublime privilege of his revolt, and then the one-eyed puller of wires became himself again, full of care and wisdom and far-reaching plans, and a victim to the tormenting superstitions of his race. The night, no matter how quiet, is never perfectly silent to attentive ears, and now Babalatchi fancied he could detect in it other noises than those caused by the ripples and eddies of the river. He turned his head sharply to the right and to the left in succession, and then spun round quickly in a startled and watchful manner, as if he had expected to see the blind ghost of his departed leader wandering in the obscurity of the empty courtyard behind his back. Nothing there. Yet he had heard a noise; a strange noise! No doubt a ghostly voice of a complaining and angry spirit. He listened. Not a sound. Reassured, Babalatchi made a few paces towards his house, when a very human noise, that of hoarse coughing, reached him from the river. He stopped, listened attentively, but now without any sign of emotion, and moving

briskly back to the waterside stood expectant with parted lips, trying to pierce with his eye the wavering curtain of mist that hung low over the water. He could see nothing, yet some people in a canoe must have been very near, for he heard words spoken in an ordinary tone.

"Do you think this is the place, Ali? I can see nothing."

"It must be near here, Tuan," answered another voice. "Shall we try the bank?"

"No! . . . Let drift a little. If you go poking into the bank in the dark you might stove the canoe on some log. We must be careful. . . . Let drift! Let drift! . . . This does seem to be a clearing of some sort. We may see a light by and by from some house or other. In Lakanba's campong there are many houses? Hey?"

"A great number, Tuan . . . I do not see any light."

"Nor I," grumbled the first voice again, this time nearly abreast of the silent Babalatchi who looked uneasily towards his own house, the doorway of which glowed with the dim light of a torch burning within. The house stood end on to the river, and its doorway faced down-stream, so Babalatchi reasoned rapidly that the strangers on the river could not see the light from the position their boat was in at the moment. He could not make up his mind to call out to them, and while he hesitated he heard the voices again, but now some way below the landing-place where he stood.

"Nothing. This cannot be it. Let them give way, Ali! Dayong there!"

That order was followed by the splash of paddles, then a sudden cry—

"I see a light. I see it! Now I know where to land, Tuan."

There was more splashing as the canoe was paddled sharply round and came back up-stream close to the bank.

"Call out," said very near a deep voice, which Babalatchi felt sure must belong to a white man. "Call out—and somebody may come with a torch. I can't see anything."

The loud hail that succeeded these words was emitted nearly under the silent listener's nose. Babalatchi, to preserve appearances, ran with long but noiseless strides halfway up the courtyard, and only then shouted in answer and kept on shouting as he walked slowly back again towards the river bank. He saw there an indistinct shape of a boat, not quite alongside the landing-place.

"Who speaks on the river?" asked Babalatchi, throwing a tone of surprise into his question.

"A white man," answered Lingard from the canoe. "Is there

not one torch in rich Lakamba's campong to light a guest on his landing? "

"There are no torches and no men. I am alone here," said Babalatchi, with some hesitation.

"Alone!" exclaimed Lingard. "Who are you?"

"Only a servant of Lakamba. But land, Tuan Putih, and see my face. Here is my hand. No! Here! . . . By your mercy. . . . Ada! . . . Now you are safe."

"And you are alone here?" said Lingard, moving with precaution a few steps into the courtyard. "How dark it is," he muttered to himself—"one would think the world had been painted black."

"Yes. Alone. What more did you say, Tuan? I did not understand your talk."

"It is nothing. I expected to find here . . . But where are they all?"

"What matters where they are?" said Babalatchi, gloomily.

"Have you come to see my people? The last departed on a long journey—and I am alone. To-morrow I go too."

"I came to see a white man," said Lingard, walking on slowly.

"He is not gone, is he?"

"No!" answered Babalatchi, at his elbow. "A man with a red skin and hard eyes," he went on, musingly, "whose hand is strong, and whose heart is foolish and weak. A white man indeed . . . But still a man."

They were now at the foot of the short ladder which led to the split-bamboo platform surrounding Babalatchi's habitation. The faint light from the doorway fell down upon the two men's faces as they stood looking at each other curiously.

"Is he there?" asked Lingard, in a low voice, with a wave of his hand upwards.

Babalatchi, staring hard at his long-expected visitor, did not answer at once.

"No, not there," he said at last, placing his foot on the lowest rung and looking back. "Not there, Tuan—yet not very far. Will you sit down in my dwelling? There may be rice and fish and clear water—not from the river, but from a spring . . ."

"I am not hungry," interrupted Lingard, curtly, "and I did not come here to sit in your dwelling. Lead me to the white man who expects me. I have no time to lose."

"The night is long, Tuan," went on Babalatchi, softly, "and there are other nights and other days. Long. Very long . . . How much time it takes for a man to die! O Rajah Laut!"

Lingard started. "You know me!" he exclaimed.

"Ay—wa! I have seen your face and felt your hand before—

many years ago," said Babalatchi, holding on halfway up the ladder, and bending down from above to peer into Lingard's upturned face. "You do not remember—but I have not forgotten. There are many men like me: there is only one Rajah Laut."

He climbed with sudden agility the last few steps, and stood on the platform waving his hand invitingly to Lingard, who followed after a short moment of indecision.

The elastic bamboo floor of the hut bent under the heavy weight of the old seaman, who, standing within the threshold, tried to look into the smoky gloom of the low dwelling. Under the torch, thrust into the cleft of a stick, fastened at a right angle to the middle stay of the ridge pole, lay a red patch of light, showing a few shabby mats and a corner of a big wooden chest the rest of which was lost in shadow. In the obscurity of the more remote parts of the house a lance-head, a brass tray hung on the wall, the long barrel of a gun leaning against the chest, caught the stray rays of the smoky illumination in trembling gleams that wavered, disappeared, reappeared, went out, came back—as if engaged in a doubtful struggle with the darkness that, lying in wait in distant corners, seemed to dart out viciously towards its feeble enemy. The vast space under the high pitch of the roof was filled with a thick cloud of smoke, whose under-side—level like a ceiling—reflected the light of the swaying dull flame, while at the top it oozed out through the imperfect thatch of dried palm leaves. An indescribable and complicated smell, made up of the exhalation of damp earth below, of the taint of dried fish and of the effluvia of rotting vegetable matter, pervaded the place and caused Lingard to sniff strongly as he strode over, sat on the chest, and, leaning his elbows on his knees, took his head between his hands and stared at the doorway thoughtfully.

Babalatchi moved about in the shadows, whispering to an indistinct form or two that flitted about at the far end of the hut. Without stirring Lingard glanced sideways, and caught sight of muffled-up human shapes that hovered for a moment near the edge of light and retreated suddenly back into the darkness. Babalatchi approached, and sat at Lingard's feet on a rolled-up bundle of mats.

"Will you eat rice and drink sagueir?" he said. "I have waked up my household."

"My friend," said Lingard, without looking at him, "when I come to see Lakamba, or any of Lakamba's servants, I am never hungry and never thirsty. Tau! Savee! Never! Do you think I am devoid of reason? That there is nothing there?"

He sat up, and, fixing abruptly his eyes on Babalatchi, tapped his own forehead significantly.

"Tse! Tse! Tse! How can you talk like that, Tuan!" exclaimed Babalatchi, in a horrified tone.

"I talk as I think. I have lived many years," said Lingard, stretching his arm negligently to take up the gun, which he began to examine knowingly, cocking it, and easing down the hammer several times. "This is good. Mataram make. Old too," he went on.

"Hai!" broke in Babalatchi, eagerly. "I got it when I was young. He was an Aru trader, a man with a big stomach and a loud voice, and brave—very brave. When we came up with his prau in the grey morning, he stood aft shouting to his men and fired this gun at us once. Only once!" . . . He paused, laughed softly, and went on in a low, dreamy voice. "In the grey morning we came up: forty silent men in a swift Sulu prau; and when the sun was so high" . . . here he held up his hands about three feet apart—"when the sun was only so high, Tuan, our work was done—and there was a feast ready for the fishes of the sea."

"Aye! aye!" muttered Lingard, nodding his head slowly. "I see. You should not let it get rusty like this," he added.

He let the gun fall between his knees, and moving back on his seat, leaned his head against the wall of the hut, crossing his arms on his breast.

"A good gun," went on Babalatchi. "Carry far and true. Better than this—there."

With the tips of his fingers he touched gently the butt of a revolver peeping out of the right pocket of Lingard's white jacket.

"Take your hand off that," said Lingard sharply, but in a good-humoured tone and without making the slightest movement.

Babalatchi smiled and hitched his seat a little further off.

For some time they sat in silence. Lingard, with his head tilted back, looked downwards with lowered eyelids at Babalatchi, who was tracing invisible lines with his finger on the mat between his feet. Outside, they could hear Ali and the other boatmen chattering and laughing round the fire they had lighted in the big and deserted courtyard.

"Well, what about that white man?" said Lingard, quietly.

It seemed as if Babalatchi had not heard the question. He went on tracing elaborate patterns on the floor for a good while. Lingard waited motionless. At last the Malay lifted his head.

"Hai! The white man. I know!" he murmured absently. "This white man or another. . . . Tuan," he said aloud with unexpected animation, "you are a man of the sea?"

"You know me. Why ask?" said Lingard, in a low tone.

"Yes. A man of the sea—even as we are. A true Orang Laut,"

went on Babalatchi, thoughtfully, "not like the rest of the white men."

"I am like other whites, and do not wish to speak many words when the truth is short. I came here to see the white man that helped Lakamba against Patalolo, who is my friend. Show me where that white man lives; I want him to hear my talk."

"Talk only? Tuan! Why hurry? The night is long and death is swift—as you ought to know; you who have dealt it to so many of my people. Many years ago I have faced you, arms in hand. Do you not remember? It was in Carimata—far from here."

"I cannot remember every vagabond that came in my way," protested Lingard, seriously.

"Hai! Hai!" continued Babalatchi, unmoved and dreamy. "Many years ago. Then all this"—and looking up suddenly at Lingard's beard, he flourished his fingers below his own beardless chin—"then all this was like gold in sunlight, now it is like the foam of an angry sea."

"Maybe, maybe," said Lingard, patiently, paying the involuntary tribute of a faint sigh to the memories of the past evoked by Babalatchi's words.

He had been living with Malays so long and so close that the extreme deliberation and deviousness of their mental proceedings had ceased to irritate him much. To-night, perhaps, he was less prone to impatience than ever. He was disposed, if not to listen to Babalatchi, then to let him talk. It was evident to him that the man had something to say, and he hoped that from the talk a ray of light would shoot through the thick blackness of inexplicable treachery, to show him clearly—if only for a second—the man upon whom he would have to execute the verdict of justice. Justice only! Nothing was further from his thoughts than such an useless thing as revenge. Justice only. It was his duty that justice should be done—and by his own hand. He did not like to think how. To him, as to Babalatchi, it seemed that the night would be long enough for the work he had to do. But he did not define to himself the nature of the work, and he sat very still, and willingly dilatory, under the fearsome oppression of his call. What was the good to think about it? It was inevitable, and its time was near. Yet he could not command his memories that came crowding round him in that evil-smelling hut, while Babalatchi talked on in a flowing monotone, nothing of him moving but the lips, in the artificially inanimated face. Lingard, like an anchored ship that had broken her sheer, darted about here and there on the rapid tide of his recollections. The subdued sound of soft words rang around him, but his thoughts were lost, now in the contemplation of the past sweetness and strife of Carimata days, now in the

uncasy wonder at the failure of his judgment; at the fatal blindness of accident that had caused him, many years ago, to rescue a half-starved runaway from a Dutch ship in Samarang roads. How he had liked the man: his assurance, his push, his desire to get on, his conceited good-humour and his selfish eloquence. He had liked his very faults—those faults that had so many, to him, sympathetic sides. And he had always dealt fairly by him from the very beginning; and he would deal fairly by him now—to the very end. This last thought darkened Lingard's features with a responsive and menacing frown. The doer of justice sat with compressed lips and a heavy heart, while in the calm darkness outside the silent world seemed to be waiting breathlessly for that justice he held in his hand—in his strong hand:—ready to strike—reluctant to move.

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BABALATCHI ceased speaking. Lingard shifted his feet a little, uncrossed his arms, and shook his head slowly. The narrative of the events in Sambir, related from the point of view of the astute statesman, the sense of which had been caught here and there by his inattentive ears, had been yet like a thread to guide him out of the sombre labyrinth of his thoughts; and now he had come to the end of it, out of the tangled past into the pressing necessities of the present. With the palms of his hands on his knees, his elbows squared out, he looked down on Babalatchi who sat in a stiff attitude, inexpressive and mute as a talking doll, the mechanism of which had at length run down.

"You people did all this," said Lingard at last, "and you will be sorry for it before the dry wind begins to blow again. Abdulla's voice will bring the Dutch rule here."

Babalatchi waved his hand towards the dark doorway.

"There are forests there. Lakamba rules the land now. Tell me, Tuan, do you think the big trees know the name of the ruler? No. They are born, they grow, they live and they die—yet know not, feel not. It is their land."

"Even a big tree may be killed by a small axe," said Lingard, drily. "And, remember, my one-eyed friend, that axes are made by white hands. You will soon find that out, since you have hoisted the flag of the Dutch."

"Ay—wa!" said Babalatchi, slowly. "It is written that the earth belongs to those who have fair skins and hard but foolish hearts. The further away is the master, the easier it is for the slave, Tuan! You were too near. Your voice rang in our ears

always. Now it is not going to be so. The great Rajah in Batavia is strong, but he may be deceived. He must speak very loud to be heard here. But if we have need to shout, then he must hear the many voices that call for protection. He is but a white man."

"If I ever spoke to Patalolo, like an elder brother, it was for your good—for the good of all," said Lingard with great earnestness.

"This is a white man's talk," exclaimed Babalatchi, with bitter exultation. "I know you. That is how you all talk while you load your guns and sharpen your swords; and when you are ready, then to those who are weak you say: 'Obey me and be happy, or die!' You are strange, you white men. You think it is only your wisdom and your virtue and your happiness that are true. You are stronger than the wild beasts, but not so wise. A black tiger knows when he is not hungry—you do not. He knows the difference between himself and those that can speak; you do not understand the difference between yourselves and us—who are men. You are wise and great—and you shall always be fools."

He threw up both his hands, stirring the sleeping cloud of smoke that hung above his head, and brought the open palms on the flimsy floor on each side of his outstretched legs. The whole hut shook. Lingard looked at the excited statesman curiously.

"Apa! Apa! What's the matter?" he murmured, soothingly. "Whom did I kill here? Where are my guns? What have I done? What have I eaten up?"

Babalatchi calmed down, and spoke with studied courtesy.

"You, Tuan, are of the sea, and more like what we are. Therefore I speak to you all the words that are in my heart. . . . Only once has the sea been stronger than the Rajah of the sea."

"You know it; do you?" said Lingard, with pained sharpness.

"Hai! We have heard about your ship—and some rejoiced. Not I. Amongst the whites, who are devils, you are a man."

"Trima kassi! I give you thanks," said Lingard, gravely.

Babalatchi looked down with a bashful smile, but his face saddened directly, and when he spoke again it was in a mournful tone.

"Had you come a day sooner, Tuan, you would have seen an enemy die. You would have seen him die poor, blind, unhappy—with no son to dig his grave and speak of his wisdom and courage. Yes; you would have seen the man that fought you in Carimata many years ago, die alone—but for one friend. A great sight to you."

"Not to me," answered Lingard. "I did not even remember him till you spoke his name just now. You do not understand us. We fight, we vanquish—and we forget."

"True, true," said Babalatchi, with polite irony; "you whites are so great that you disdain to remember your enemies. No! No!" he went on, in the same tone, "you have so much mercy for us, that there is no room for any remembrance. Oh, you are great and good! But it is in my mind that amongst yourselves you know how to remember. Is it not so, Tuan?"

Lingard said nothing. His shoulders moved imperceptibly. He laid his gun across his knees and stared at the flint lock absently.

"Yes," went on Babalatchi, falling again into a mournful mood, "yes, he died in darkness. I sat by his side and held his hand, but he could not see the face of him who watched the faint breath on his lips. She, whom he had cursed because of the white man, was there too, and wept with covered face. The white man walked about the courtyard making many noises. Now and then he would come to the doorway and glare at us who mourned. He stared with wicked eyes, and then I was glad that he who was dying was blind. This is true talk. I was glad; for a white man's eyes are not good to see when the devil that lives within is looking out through them."

"Devil! Hey?" said Lingard, half aloud to himself, as if struck with the obviousness of some novel idea. Babalatchi went on:

"At the first hour of the morning he sat up—he so weak—and said plainly some words that were not meant for human ears. I held his hand tightly, but it was time for the leader of brave men to go amongst the Faithful who are happy. They of my household brought a white sheet, and I began to dig a grave in the hut in which he died. She mourned aloud. The white man came to the doorway and shouted. He was angry. Angry with her because she beat her breast, and tore her hair, and mourned with shrill cries as a woman should. Do you understand what I say, Tuan? That white man came inside the hut with great fury, and took her by the shoulder, and dragged her out. Yes, Tuan. I saw Omar dead, and I saw her at the feet of that white dog who has deceived me. I saw his face grey, like the cold mist of the morning; I saw his pale eyes looking down at Omar's daughter beating her head on the ground at his feet. At the feet of him who is Abdulla's slave. Yes, he lives by Abdulla's will. That is why I held my hand while I saw all this. I held my hand because we are now under the flag of the Orang Blanda, and Abdulla can speak into the ears of the great. We must not have any trouble with white men. Abdulla has spoken—and I must obey."

"That's it, is it?" growled Lingard in his moustache. Then in Malay, "It seems that you are angry, O Babalatchi!"

"No; I am not angry, Tuan," answered Babalatchi, descending

from the insecure heights of his indignation into the insincere depths of safe humility. "I am not angry. What am I to be angry? I am only an Orang Laut, and I have fled before your people many times. Servant of this one—protected of another; I have given my counsel here and there for a handful of rice. What am I, to be angry with a white man? What is anger without the power to strike? But you whites have taken all: the land, the sea, and the power to strike! And there is nothing left for us in the islands but your white men's justice; your great justice that knows not anger."

He got up and stood for a moment in the doorway, sniffing the hot air of the courtyard, then turned back and leaned against the stay of the ridge pole, facing Lingard who kept his seat on the chest. The torch, consumed nearly to the end, burned noisily. Small explosions took place in the heart of the flame, driving through its smoky blaze strings of hard, round puffs of white smoke, no bigger than peas, which rolled out of doors in the faint draught that came from invisible cracks of the bamboo walls. The pungent taint of unclean things below and about the hut grew heavier, weighing down Lingard's resolution and his thoughts in an irresistible numbness of the brain. He thought drowsily of himself and of that man who wanted to see him—who waited to see him. Who waited! Night and day. Waited. . . . A spiteful but vaporous idea floated through his brain that such waiting could not be very pleasant to the fellow. Well, let him wait. He would see him soon enough. And for how long? Five seconds—five minutes—say nothing—say something. What? No! Just give him time to take one good look, and then . . .

Suddenly Babalatchi began to speak in a soft voice. Lingard blinked, cleared his throat—sat up straight.

"You know all now, Tuan. Lakamba dwells in the stockaded house of Patalolo; Abdulla has begun to build godowns of plank and stone; and now that Omar is dead, I myself shall depart from this place and live with Lakamba and speak in his ear. I have served many. The best of them all sleeps in the ground in a white sheet, with nothing to mark his grave but the ashes of the hut in which he died. Yes, Tuan! the white man destroyed it himself. With a blazing brand in his hand he strode around, shouting to me to come out—shouting to me, who was throwing earth on the body of a great leader. Yes; swearing to me by the name of your God and ours that he would burn me and her in there if we did not make haste. . . . Hāi! The white men are very masterful and wise. I dragged her out quickly."

"Oh, damn it!" exclaimed Lingard—then went on in Malay, speaking earnestly. "Listen. That man is not like other white

men. You know he is not. He is not a man at all. He is . . . I don't know."

Babalatchi lifted his hand deprecatingly. His eye twinkled, and his red-stained big lips, parted by an expressionless grin, uncovered a stumpy row of black teeth filed evenly to the gums.

"Hai! Hai! Not like you. Not like you," he said, increasing the softness of his tones as he neared the object uppermost in his mind during that much-desired interview. "Not like you, Tuan, who are like ourselves, only wiser and stronger. Yet he, also, is full of great cunning, and speaks of you without any respect, after the manner of white men when they talk of one another."

Lingard leaped in his seat as if he had been prodded.

"He speaks! What does he say?" he shouted.

"Nay, Tuan," protested the composed Babalatchi; "what matters his talk if he is not a man? I am nothing before you—why should I repeat words of one white man about another? He did boast to Abdulla of having learned much from your wisdom in years past. Other words I have forgotten. Indeed, Tuan, I have . . ."

Lingard cut short Babalatchi's protestations by a contemptuous wave of the hand and rescued himself with dignity.

"I shall go," said Babalatchi, "and the white man will remain here, alone with the spirit of the dead and with her who has been the delight of his heart. He, being white, cannot hear the voice of those that died. . . . Tell me, Tuan," he went on, looking at Lingard with curiosity—"tell me, Tuan, do you white people ever hear the voices of the invisible ones?"

"We do not," answered Lingard, "because those that we cannot see do not speak."

"Never speak! And never complain with sounds that are not words?" exclaimed Babalatchi, doubtingly. "It may be so—or your ears are dull. We Malays hear many sounds near the places where men are buried. To-night I heard . . . Yes, even I have heard. . . . I do not want to hear any more," he added, nervously. "Perhaps I was wrong when I . . . There are things I regret. The trouble was heavy in his heart when he died. Sometimes I think I was wrong . . . but I do not want to hear the complaint of invisible lips. Therefore I go, Tuan. Let the unquiet spirit speak to his enemy the white man who knows not fear, or love, or mercy—knows nothing but contempt and violence. I have been wrong! I have! Hai! Hai!"

He stood for a while with his elbow in the palm of his left hand, the fingers of the other over his lips as if to stifle the expression of inconvenient remorse; then after glancing at the

torch. burnt out nearly to its end, he moved towards the wall by the chest, fumbled about there and suddenly flung open a large shutter of attaps woven in a light framework of sticks. Lingard swung his legs quickly round the corner of his seat.

"Hallo!" he said, surprised.

The cloud of smoke stirred, and a slow wisp curled out through the new opening. The torch flickered, hissed, and went out, the glowing end falling on the mat, whence Babalatchi snatched it up and tossed it outside through the open square. It described a vanishing curve of red light, and lay below, shining feebly in the vast darkness. Babalatchi remained with his arm stretched out into the empty night.

"There," he said, "you can see the white man's courtyard, Tuan, and his house."

"I can see nothing," answered Lingard, putting his head through the shutter-hole. "It's too dark."

"Wait, Tuan," urged Babalatchi. "You have been looking long at the burning torch. You will soon see. Mind the gun, Tuan. It is loaded."

"There is no flint in it. You could not find a firestone for a hundred miles round this spot," said Lingard, testily. "Foolish thing to load that gun."

"I have a stone. I had it from a man wise and pious that lives in Menang Kabau. A very pious man—very good fire. He spoke words over that stone that make its sparks good. And the gun is good—carries straight and far. Would carry from here to the door of the white man's house, I believe, Tuan."

"Tida apa. Never mind your gun," muttered Lingard, peering into the formless darkness. "Is that the house—that black thing over there?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Babalatchi; "that is his house. He lives there by the will of Abdulla, and shall live there till . . . From where you stand, Tuan, you can look over the fence and across the courtyard straight at the door—at the door from which he comes out every morning, looking like a man that had seen Jehannum in his sleep."

Lingard drew his head in. Babalatchi touched his shoulder with a groping hand.

"Wait a little, Tuan. Sit still. The morning is not far off now—a morning without sun after a night without stars. But there will be light enough to see the man who said not many days ago that he alone has made you less than a child in Sambir."

He felt a slight tremor under his hand, but took it off directly and began feeling all over the lid of the chest, behind Lingard's back, for the gun.

"What are you at?" said Lingard, impatiently. "You do worry about that rotten gun. You had better get a light."

"A light! I tell you, Tuan, that the light of heaven is very near," said Babalatchi, who had now obtained possession of the object of his solicitude, and grasping it strongly by its long barrel, grounded the stock at his feet.

"Perhaps it is near," said Lingard, leaning both his elbows on the lower cross-piece of the primitive window and looking out. "It is very black outside yet," he remarked carelessly.

Babalatchi fidgeted about. "It is not good for you to sit where you may be seen," he muttered.

"Why not?" asked Lingard.

"The white man sleeps, it is true," explained Babalatchi, softly; "yet he may come out early, and he has arms."

"Ah! he has arms?" said Lingard.

"Yes; a short gun that fires many times—like yours here. Abdulla had to give it to him."

Lingard heard Babalatchi's words, but made no movement. To the old adventurer the idea that firearms could be dangerous in other hands than his own did not occur readily, and certainly not in connection with Willems. He was so busy with the thoughts about what he considered his own sacred duty, that he could not give any consideration to the probable actions of the man of whom he thought—as one may think of an executed criminal—with wondering indignation tempered by scornful pity. While he sat staring into the darkness, that every minute grew thinner before his pensive eyes, like a dispersing mist, Willems appeared to him as a figure belonging already wholly to the past—a figure that could come in no way into his life again. He had made up his mind, and the thing was as well as done. In his weary thoughts he had closed this fatal, inexplicable, and horrible episode in his life. The worst had happened. The coming days would see the retribution.

He had removed an enemy once or twice before, out of his path; he had paid off some very heavy scores a good many times. Captain Tom had been a good friend to many: but it was generally understood, from Honolulu round about to Diego Suarez, that Captain Tom's enmity was rather more than any man single-handed could easily manage. He would not, as he said often, hurt a fly as long as the fly left him alone; yet a man does not live for years beyond the pale of civilized laws without evolving for himself some queer notions of justice. Nobody of those he knew had ever cared to point out to him the errors of his conceptions. It was not worth anybody's while to run counter to Lingard's ideas of the fitness of things—that fact was acquired to the

floating wisdom of the South Seas, of the Eastern Archipelago, and was nowhere better understood than in out-of-the-way nooks of the world; in those nooks which he filled, unresisted and masterful, with the echoes of his noisy presence. There is not much use in arguing with a man who boasts of never having regretted a single action of his life, whose answer to a mild criticism is a good-natured shout—"You know nothing about it. I would do it again. Yes, sir!" His associates and his acquaintances accepted him, his opinions, his actions like things preordained and unchangeable; looked upon his many-sided manifestations with passive wonder not unmixed with that admiration which is only the rightful due of a successful man. But nobody had ever seen him in the mood he was in now. Nobody had seen Lingard doubtful and giving way to doubt, unable to make up his mind and unwilling to act; Lingard timid and hesitating one minute, angry yet inactive the next; Lingard puzzled in a word, because confronted with a situation that discomposed him by its unprovoked malevolence, by its ghastly injustice, that to his rough but unsophisticated palate tasted distinctly of sulphurous fumes from the deepest hell.

The smooth darkness filling the shutter-hole grew paler and became blotchy with ill-defined shapes, as if a new universe was being evolved out of sombre chaos. Then outlines came out, defining forms without any details, indicating here a tree, there a bush; a black belt of forest far off; the straight lines of a house, the ridge of a high roof near by. Inside the hut, Babalatchi, who lately had been only a persuasive voice, became a human shape leaning its chin imprudently on the muzzle of a gun and rolling an uneasy eye over the reappearing world. The day came rapidly, dismal and oppressed by the fog of the river and by the heavy vapours of the sky—a day without colour and without sunshine: incomplete, disappointing, and sad.

Babalatchi twitched gently Lingard's sleeve, and when the old seaman had lifted up his head interrogatively, he stretched out an arm and a pointing forefinger towards Willems' house, now plainly visible to the right and beyond the big tree of the courtyard.

"Look, Tuan!" he said. "He lives there. That is the door—his door. Through it he will appear soon, with his hair in disorder and his mouth full of curses. That is so. He is a white man, and never satisfied. It is in my mind he is angry even in his sleep. A dangerous man. As Tuan may observe," he went on, obsequiously, "his door faces this opening, where you condescend to sit, which is concealed from all eyes. Faces it—straight—and not far. Observe, Tuan, not at all far."

"Yes, yes; I can see. I shall see him when he wakes."

"No doubt, Tuan. When he wakes. . . . If you remain here he cannot see you. I shall withdraw quickly and prepare my canoe myself. I am only a poor man, and must go to Sambir to greet Lakamba when he opens his eyes. I must bow before Abdulla, who has strength—even more strength than you. Now if you remain here, you shall easily behold the man who boasted to Abdulla that he had been your friend, even while he prepared to fight those who called you protector. Yes, he plotted with Abdulla for that cursed flag. Lakamba was blind then, and I was deceived. But you, Tuan! Remember, he deceived you more. Of that he boasted before all men."

He leaned the gun quietly against the wall close to the window, and said softly: "Shall I go now, Tuan? Be careful of the gun. I have put the fire-stone in. The fire-stone of the wise man, which never fails."

Lingard's eyes were fastened on the distant doorway. Across his line of sight, in the grey emptiness of the courtyard, a big fruit-pigeon flapped languidly towards the forests with a loud booming cry, like the note of a deep gong: a brilliant bird looking in the gloom of threatening day as black as a crow. A serried flock of white rice-birds rose above the trees with a faint scream, and hovered, swaying in a disordered mass that suddenly scattered in all directions, as if burst asunder by a silent explosion. Behind his back Lingard heard a shuffle of feet—women leaving the hut. In the other courtyard a voice was heard complaining of cold, and coming very feeble, but exceedingly distinct, out of the vast silence of the abandoned houses and clearings. Babalatchi coughed discreetly. From under the house the thumping of wooden pestles husking the rice started with unexpected abruptness. The weak but clear voice in the yard again urged, "Blow up the embers, O brother!" Another voice answered, drawling in modulated, thin sing-song, "Do it yourself, O shivering pig!" and the drawl of the last words stopped short, as if the man had fallen into a deep hole. Babalatchi coughed again a little impatiently, and said in a confidential tone—

"Do you think it is time for me to go, Tuan? Will you take care of my gun, Tuan? I am a man that knows how to obey; even obey Abdulla, who has deceived me. Nevertheless this gun carries far and true—if you would want to know, Tuan. And I have put in a double measure of powder, and three slugs. Yes, Tuan. Now—perhaps—I go."

When Babalatchi commenced speaking, Lingard turned slowly round and gazed upon him with the dull and unwilling look of a sick man waking to another day of suffering. As the astute

statesman proceeded, Lingard's eyebrows came close, his eyes became animated, and a big vein stood out on his forehead, accentuating a lowering frown. When speaking his last words Babalatchi faltered, then stopped, confused, before the steady gaze of the old seaman.

Lingard rose. His face cleared, and he looked down at the anxious Babalatchi with sudden benevolence.

"So! That's what you were after," he said, laying a heavy hand on Babalatchi's yielding shoulder. "You thought I came here to murder him. Hey? Speak! You faithful dog of an Arab trader!"

"And what else, Tuan?" shrieked Babalatchi, exasperated into sincerity. "What else, Tuan! Remember what he has done; he poisoned our ears with his talk about you. You are a man. If you did not come to kill, Tuan, then either I am a fool or . . ." He paused, struck his naked breast with his open palm, and finished in a discouraged whisper—"or Tuan, you are."

Lingard looked down at him with scornful serenity. After his long and painful gropings amongst the obscure abominations of Willems' conduct, the logical if tortuous evolutions of Babalatchi's diplomatic mind were to him welcome as daylight. There was something at last he could understand—the clear effect of a simple cause. He felt indulgent towards the disappointed sage.

"So you are angry with your friend, O one-eyed one!" he said slowly, nodding his fierce countenance close to Babalatchi's discomfited face. "It seems to me that you must have had much to do with what happened in Sambir lately. Hey? You son of a burnt father."

"May I perish under your hand, O Rajah of the sea, if my words are not true!" said Babalatchi, with reckless excitement. "You are here in the midst of your enemies. He the greatest. Abdulla would do nothing without him, and I could do nothing without Abdulla. Strike me—so that you strike all!"

"Who are you," exclaimed Lingard contemptuously—"who are you to dare call yourself my enemy! Dirt! Nothing! Go out first," he went on severely. "Lakas! quick. March out!"

He pushed Babalatchi through the doorway and followed him down the short ladder into the courtyard. The boatmen squatting over the fire turned their slow eyes with apparent difficulty towards the two men; then, unconcerned, huddled close together again, stretching forlornly their hands over the embers. The women stopped in their work and with uplifted pestles flashed quick and curious glances from the gloom under the house.

"Is that the way?" asked Lingard with a nod towards the little wicket-gate of Willems' enclosure.

"If you seek death, that is surely the way," answered Babalatchi in a dispassionate voice, as if he had exhausted all the emotions. "He lives there: he who destroyed your friends; who hastened Omar's death; who plotted with Abdulla first against you, then against me. I have been like a child. O shame! . . . But go, Tuan. Go there."

"I go where I like," said Lingard, emphatically, "and you may go to the devil; I do not want you any more. The islands of these seas shall sink before I, Rajah Laut, serve the will of any of your people. Tau? But I tell you this: I do not care what you do with him after to-day. And I say that because I am merciful."

"Tida! I do nothing," said Babalatchi, shaking his head with bitter apathy. "I am in Abdulla's hand and care not, even as you do. No! no!" he added, turning away, "I have learned much wisdom this morning. There are no men anywhere, You whites are cruel to your friends and merciful to your enemies—which is the work of fools."

He went away towards the riverside, and, without once looking back, disappeared in the low bank of mist that lay over the water and the shore. Lingard followed him with his eyes thoughtfully. After a while he roused himself and called out to his boatmen—

"Hai—ya there! After you have eaten rice, wait for me with your paddles in your hands. You hear?"

"Ada, Tuan!" answered Ali through the smoke of the morning fire that was spreading itself, low and gentle, over the courtyard—"we hear!"

Lingard opened slowly the little wicket-gate, made a few steps into the empty enclosure, and stopped. He had felt about his head the short breath of a puff of wind that passed him, made every leaf of the big tree shiver—and died out in a hardly perceptible tremor of branches and twigs. Instinctively he glanced upwards with a seaman's impulse. Above him, under the grey motionless waste of a stormy sky, drifted low black vapours, in stretching bars, in shapeless patches, in sinuous wisps and tormented spirals. Over the courtyard and the house floated a round, sombre, and lingering cloud, dragging behind a tail of tangled and filmy streamers—like the dishevelled hair of a mourning woman.

“**B**EWARE!”

The tremulous effort and the broken, inadequate tone of the faint cry, surprised Lingard more than the unexpected suddenness of the warning conveyed, he did not know by whom and to whom. Besides himself there was no one in the courtyard as far as he could see. The cry was not renewed, and his watchful eyes, scanning warily the misty solitude of Willems' enclosure, were met everywhere only by the stolid impassiveness of inanimate things: the big sombre-looking tree, the shut-up, sightless house, the glistening bamboo fences, the damp and drooping bushes further off—all these things, that, condemned to look for ever at the incomprehensible afflictions or joys of mankind, assert in their aspect of cold unconcern the high dignity of lifeless matter that surrounds, incurious and unmoved, the restless mysteries of the ever-changing, of the never-ending life.

Lingard, stepping aside, put the trunk of the tree between himself and the house, then, moving cautiously round one of the projecting buttresses, had to tread short in order to avoid scattering a small heap of black embers upon which he came unexpectedly on the other side. A thin, wizened, little old woman, who, standing behind the tree, had been looking at the house, turned towards him with a start, gazed with faded, expressionless eyes at the intruder, then made a limping attempt to get away. She seemed, however, to realize directly the hopelessness or the difficulty of the undertaking, stopped, hesitated, tottered back slowly; then, after blinking dully, fell suddenly on her knees amongst the white ashes, and, bending over the heap of smouldering coals, distended her sunken cheeks in a steady effort to blow up the hidden sparks into a useful blaze. Lingard looked down on her, but she seemed to have made up her mind that there was not enough life left in her lean body for anything else than the discharge of the simple domestic duty, and, apparently, she begrudged him the least moment of attention. After waiting for a while, Lingard asked—

“Why did you call, O daughter?”

“I saw you enter,” she croaked feebly, still grovelling with her face near the ashes and without looking up, “and I called—the cry of warning. It was her order. Her order,” she repeated, with a moaning sigh.

“And did she hear?” pursued Lingard, with gentle composure.

Her projecting shoulder-blades moved uneasily under the thin stuff of the tight body jacket. She scrambled up with difficulty

to her feet, and hobbled away, muttering peevishly to herself, towards a pile of dry brushwood heaped up against the fence.

Lingard, looking idly after her, heard the rattle of loose planks that led from the ground to the door of the house. He moved his head beyond the shelter of the tree and saw Aissa coming down the inclined way into the courtyard. After making a few hurried paces towards the tree, she stopped with one foot advanced in an appearance of sudden terror, and her eyes glanced wildly right and left. Her head was uncovered. A blue cloth wrapped her from her head to foot in close slanting folds, with one end thrown over her shoulder. A tress of her black hair strayed across her bosom. Her bare arms pressed down close to her body, with hands open and outstretched fingers; her slightly elevated shoulders and the backward inclination of her torso gave her the aspect of one defiant yet shrinking from a coming blow. She had closed the door of the house behind her; and as she stood solitary in the unnatural and threatening twilight of the murky day, with everything unchanged around her, she appeared to Lingard as if she had been made there, on the spot, out of the black vapours of the sky and of the sinister gleams of feeble sunshine that struggled, through the thickening clouds, into the colourless desolation of the world.

After a short but attentive glance towards the shut-up house, Lingard stepped out from behind the tree and advanced slowly towards her. The sudden fixity of her—till then—restless eyes and a slight twitch of her hands were the only signs she gave at first of having seen him. She made a long stride forward, and putting herself right in his path, stretched her arms across; her black eyes opened wide, her lips parted as if in an uncertain attempt to speak—but no sound came out to break the significant silence of their meeting. Lingard stopped and looked at her with stern curiosity. After a while he said composedly—

“Let me pass. I came here to talk to a man. Does he hide? Has he sent you?”

She made a step nearer, her arms fell by her side, then she put them straight out nearly touching Lingard's breast.

“He knows not fear,” she said, speaking low, with a forward throw of her head, in a voice trembling but distinct. “It is my own fear that has sent me here. He sleeps.”

“He has slept long enough,” said Lingard, in measured tones. “I am come—and now is the time of his waking. Go and tell him this—or else my own voice will call him up. A voice he knows well.”

He put her hands down firmly and again made as if to pass by her.

"Do not!" she exclaimed, and fell at his feet as if she had been cut down by a scythe. The unexpected suddenness of her movement startled Lingard, who stepped back.

"What's this?" he exclaimed in a wondering whisper—then added in a tone of sharp command: "Stand up!"

She rose at once and stood looking at him, timorous and fearless; yet with a fire of recklessness burning in her eyes that made clear her resolve to pursue her purpose—even to the death. Lingard went on in a severe voice—

"Go out of my path. You are Omar's daughter, and you ought to know that when men meet in daylight women must be silent and abide their fate."

"Women!" she retorted, with subdued vehemence. "Yes, I am a woman! Your eyes see that, O Rajah Laut, but can you see my life? I also have heard—O man of many fights—I also have heard the voice of fire-arms; I also have felt the rain of young awigs and of leaves cut up by bullets fall down about my head; I also know how to look in silence at angry faces and at strong hands raised high grasping sharp steel. I also saw men fall dead around me without a cry of fear and of mourning; and I have watched the sleep of weary fugitives, and looked at night shadows full of menace and death with eyes that knew nothing but watchfulness. And," she went on, with a mournful drop in her voice, "I have faced the heartless sea, held on my lap the heads of those who died raving from thirst, and from their cold hands took the paddle and worked so that those with me did not know that one man more was dead. I did all this. What more have you done? That was my life. What has been yours?"

The matter and the manner of her speech held Lingard motionless attentive and approving against his will. She ceased speaking, and from her staring black eyes with a narrow border of white above and below, a double ray of her very soul streamed out in a fierce desire to light up the most obscure designs of his heart. After a long silence, which served to emphasize the meaning of her words, she added in the whisper of bitter regret—

"And I have knelt at your feet! And I am afraid!"

"You," said Lingard deliberately, and returning her look with an interested gaze, "you are a woman whose heart, I believe, is great enough to fill a man's breast: but still you are a woman, and to you, I, Rajah Laut, have nothing to say."

She listened bending her head in a movement of forced attention; and his voice sounded to her unexpected, far off, with the distant and unearthly ring of voices that we hear in dreams, saying faintly things startling, cruel or absurd, to which there is no possible reply. To her he had nothing to say! She wrung her

hands, glanced over the courtyard with that eager and distracted look that sees nothing, then looked up at the hopeless sky of livid grey and drifting black; at the unquiet mourning of the hot and brilliant heaven that had seen the beginning of her love, that had heard his entreaties and her answers, that had seen his desire and her fear; that had seen her joy, her surrender—and his defeat. Lingard moved a little, and this slight stir near her precipitated her disordered and shapeless thoughts into hurried words.

"Wait!" she exclaimed in a stifled voice, and went on disconnectedly and rapidly—"Stay. I have heard. Men often spoke by the fires . . . men of my people. And they said of you—the first on the sea—they said that to men's cries you were deaf in battle, but after . . . No! even while you fought, your ears were open to the voice of children and women. They said . . . that. Now I, a woman, I . . ."

She broke off suddenly and stood before him with dropped eyelids and parted lips, so still now that she seemed to have been changed into a breathless, an unhearing, an unseeing figure, without knowledge of fear or hope, of anger or despair. In the astounding repose that came on her face, nothing moved but the delicate nostrils that expanded and collapsed quickly, flutteringly, in interrupted beats, like the wings of a snared bird.

"I am white," said Lingard, proudly, looking at her with a steady gaze where simple curiosity was giving way to a pitying annoyance, "and men you have heard, spoke only what is true over the evening fires. My ears are open to your prayer. But listen to me before you speak. For yourself you need not be afraid. You can come even now with me and you shall find refuge in the household of Syed Abdulla—who is of your own faith. And this also you must know: nothing that you may say will change my purpose towards the man who is sleeping—or hiding—in that house."

Again she gave him the look that was like a stab, not of anger but of desire; of the intense, over-powering desire to see in, to see through, to understand everything: every thought, emotion, purpose; every impulse, every hesitation inside that man; inside that white-clad foreign being who looked at her, who spoke to her, who breathed before her like any other man, but bigger, red-faced, white-haired and mysterious. It was the future clothed in flesh; the to-morrow; the day after; all the days, all the years of her life standing there before her alive and secret, with all their good or evil shut up within the breast of that man; of that man who could be persuaded, cajoled, entreated, perhaps, touched, worried; frightened—who knows?—if only first he could be

understood! She had seen a long time ago whither events were tending. She had noted the contemptuous yet menacing coldness of Abdulla; she had heard—alarmed yet unbelieving—Babalatchi's gloomy hints, covert allusions and veiled suggestions to abandon the useless white man whose fate would be the price of the peace secured by the wise and good who had no need of him any more. And he—himself! She clung to him. There was nobody else. Nothing else. She would try to cling to him always—all the life! And yet he was far from her. Further every day. Every day he seemed more distant, and she followed him patiently, hopefully, blindly, but steadily, through all the devious wanderings of his mind. She followed as well as she could. Yet at times—very often lately—she had felt lost like one strayed in the thickets of tangled undergrowth of a great forest. To her the ex-clerk of old Hudig appeared as remote, as brilliant, as terrible, as necessary, as the sun that gives life to these lands: the sun of unclouded skies that dazzles and withers; the sun beneficent and wicked—the giver of light, perfume, and pestilence. She had watched him—watched him close; fascinated by love, fascinated by danger. He was alone now—but for her; and she saw—she thought she saw—that he was like a man afraid of something. Was it possible? He afraid? Of what? Was it of that old white man who was coming—who had come? Possibly. She had heard of that man ever since she could remember. The bravest were afraid of him! And now what was in the mind of this old, old man who looked so strong? What was he going to do with the light of her life? Put it out? Take it away? Take it away for ever!—for ever!—and leave her in darkness:—not in the stirring, whispering, expectant night in which the hushed world awaits the return of sunshine; but in the night without end, the night of the grave, where nothing breathes, nothing moves, nothing thinks—the last darkness of cold and silence without hope of another sunrise.

She cried—"Your purpose! You know nothing. I must . . ."

He interrupted—unreasonably excited, as if she had, by her look, inoculated him with some of her own distress.

"I know enough."

She approached, and stood facing him at arm's length, with both her hands on his shoulders; and he, surprised by that audacity, closed and opened his eyes two or three times, aware of some emotion arising within him, from her words, her tone, her contact; an emotion unknown, singular, penetrating and sad—at the close sight of that strange woman, of that being savage and tender, strong and delicate, fearful and resolute, that had got entangled so fatally between their two lives—his own and that other white man's, the abominable scoundrel.

"How can you know?" she went on, in a persuasive tone that seemed to flow out of her very heart—"how can you know? I live with him all the days. All the nights. I look at him; I see his every breath, every glance of his eye, every movement of his lips. I see nothing else! What else is there? And even I do not understand. I do not understand him!—Him!—My life! Him who to me is so great that his presence hides the earth and the water from my sight!"

Lingard stood straight, with his hands deep in the pockets of his jacket. His eyes winked quickly, because she spoke very close to his face. She disturbed him and he had a sense of the efforts he was making to get hold of her meaning, while all the time he could not help telling himself that all this was of no use.

She added after a pause—"There has been a time when I could understand him. When I knew what was in his mind better than he knew it himself. When I felt him. When I held him. . . . And now he has escaped."

"Escaped? What? Gone away!" shouted Lingard.

"Escaped from me," she said; "left me alone. Alone. And I am ever near him. Yet alone."

Her hands slipped slowly off Lingard's shoulders and her arms fell by her side, listless, discouraged, as if to her—to her, the savage, violent, and ignorant creature—had been revealed clearly in that moment the tremendous fact of our isolation, of the loneliness impenetrable and transparent, elusive and everlasting; of the indestructible loneliness that surrounds, envelopes, clothes every human soul from the cradle to the grave, and, perhaps, beyond.

"Aye! Very well! I understand. His face is turned away from you," said Lingard. "Now, what do you want?"

"I want . . . I have looked—for help . . . everywhere . . . against men. . . . All men . . . I do not know. First they came, the invisible whites, and dealt death from afar . . . then he came. He came to me who was alone and sad. He came; angry with his brothers; great amongst his own people; angry with those I have not seen: with the people where men have no mercy and women have no shame. He was of them, and great amongst them. For he was great?"

Lingard shook his head slightly. She frowned at him, and went on in disordered haste—

"Listen. I saw him. I have lived by the side of brave men . . . of chiefs. When he came I was the daughter of a beggar—of a blind man without strength and hope. He spoke to me as if I had been brighter than the sunshine—more delightful than the cool water of the brook by which we met—more . . ."

Her anxious eyes saw some shade of expression pass on her listener's face that made her hold her breath for a second, and then explode into pained fury so violent that it drove Lingard back a pace, like an unexpected blast of wind. He lifted both his hands, incongruously paternal in his venerable aspect, bewildered and soothing, while she stretched her neck forward and shouted at him.

"I tell you I was all that to him. I know it! I saw it! . . . There are times when even you white men speak the truth. I saw his eyes. I felt his eyes, I tell you! I saw him tremble when I came near—when I spoke—when I touched him. Look at me! You have been young. Look at me. Look, Rajah Laut!"

She stared at Lingard with provoking fixity, then, turning her head quickly, she sent over her shoulder a glance, full of humble fear, at the house that stood high behind her back—dark, closed, rickety and silent on its crooked posts.

Lingard's eyes followed her look, and remained gazing expectantly at the house. After a minute or so he muttered, glancing at her suspiciously—

"If he has not heard your voice now, then he must be far away—or dead."

"He is there," she whispered, a little calmed but still anxious—"he is there. For three days he waited. Waited for you night and day. And I waited with him. I waited, watching his face, his eyes, his lips; listening to his words.—To the words I could not understand.—To the words he spoke in daylight; to the words he spoke at night in his short sleep. I listened. He spoke to himself walking up and down here—by the river; by the bushes. And I followed. I wanted to know—and I could not! He was tormented by things that made him speak in the words of his own people. Speak to himself—not to me. Not to me! What was he saying? What was he going to do? Was he afraid of you?—Of death? What was in his heart? . . . Fear? . . . Or anger? . . . what desire? . . . what sadness? He spoke; spoke; many words. All the time! And I could not know! I wanted to speak to him. He was deaf to me. I followed him everywhere, watching for some word I could understand; but his mind was in the land of his people—away from me. When I touched him he was angry—so!"

She imitated the movement of some one shaking off roughly an importunate hand, and looked at Lingard with tearful and unsteady eyes.

After a short interval of laboured panting, as if she had been out of breath with running or fighting, she looked down and went on—

"Day after day, night after night, I lived watching him—seeing nothing. And my heart was heavy—heavy with the presence of death that dwelt amongst us. I could not believe. I thought he was afraid. Afraid of you! Then I, myself knew fear. . . . Tell me, Rajah Laut, do you know the fear without voice—the fear of silence—the fear that comes when there is no one near—when there are no battles, no cries, no angry faces or armed hands anywhere? . . . The fear from which there is no escape!"

She paused, fastened her eyes again on the puzzled Lingard, and hurried on in a tone of despair—

"And I knew then he would not fight you! Before—many days ago—I went away twice to make him obey my desire; to make him strike at his own people so that he could be mine—mine! O calamity! His hand was false as your white hearts. It struck forward, pushed by my desire—by his desire of me. . . . It struck that strong hand, and—O shame!—it killed nobody! Its fierce and lying blow woke up hate without any fear. Round me all was lies. His strength was a lie. My own people lied to me—and to him. And to meet you—you the great!—he had no one but me? But me—with my rage, my pain, my weakness. Only me! And to me he would not even speak. The fool!"

She came up close to Lingard, with the wild and stealthy aspect of a lunatic longing to whisper out an insane secret—one of those misshapen, heart-rending, and ludicrous secrets; one of those thoughts that, like monsters—cruel, fantastic, and mournful, wander about terrible and unceasing in the night of madness. Lingard looked at her, astounded but unflinching. She spoke in his face, very low.

"He is all! Everything. He is my breath, my light, my heart. . . . Go away. . . . Forget him. . . . He has no courage and no wisdom any more . . . and I have lost my power. . . . Go away and forget. There are other enemies. . . . Leave him to me. He had been a man once. . . . You are too great. Nobody can withstand you. . . . I tried. . . . I know now. . . . I cry for mercy. Leave him to me and go away."

The fragments of her supplicating sentences were as if tossed on the crest of her sobs. Lingard, outwardly impassive, with his eyes fixed on the house, experienced that feeling of condemnation, deep-seated, persuasive, and masterful; that illogical impulse of disapproval which is half disgust, half vague fear, and that wakes up in our hearts in the presence of anything new or unusual, of anything that is not run into the mould of our own conscience; the accursed feeling made up of disdain, of anger, and of the sense of superior virtue that leaves us deaf, blind, contemptuous and stupid before anything which is not like ourselves.

He answered, not looking at her at first, but speaking towards the house that fascinated him—

"I go away! He wanted me to come—he himself did! . . . You must go away. You do not know what you are asking for. Listen. Go to your own people. Leave him. He is . . ."

He paused, looked down at her with his steady eyes; hesitated, as if seeking an adequate expression; then snapped his fingers, and said—

"Finish."

She stepped back, her eyes on the ground, and pressed her temples with both her hands, which she raised to her head in a slow and ample movement full of unconscious tragedy. The tone of her words was gentle and vibrating, like a loud meditation. She said—

"Tell the brook not to run to the river; tell the river not to run to the sea. Speak loud. Speak angrily. Maybe they will obey you. But it is in my mind that the brook will not care. The brook that springs out of the hillside and runs to the great river. He would not care for our words: he that cares not for the very mountain that gave him life; he that tears the earth from which he springs. Tears it, eats it, destroys it—to hurry faster to the river—to the river in which he is lost for ever. . . . O Rajah Laut! I do not care."

She drew close again to Lingard, approaching slowly, reluctantly, as if pushed by an invisible hand, and added in words that seemed to be torn out of her—

"I cared not for my own father. For him that died. I would have rather . . . You do not know what I have done . . . I . . ."

"You shall have his life," said Lingard, hastily.

They stood together, crossing their glances; she suddenly appeased, and Lingard thoughtful and uneasy under a vague sense of defeat. And yet there was no defeat. He never intended to kill the fellow—not after the first moment of anger, a long time ago. The days of bitter wonder had killed anger; had left only a bitter indignation and a bitter wish for complete justice. He felt discontented and surprised. Unexpectedly he had come upon a human being—a woman at that—who had made him disclose his will before its time. She should have his life. But she must be told, she must know, that for such men as Willems there was no favour and no grace.

"Understand," he said slowly, *"that I leave him his life not in mercy but in punishment."*

She started, watched every word on his lips, and after he finished speaking she remained still and mute in astonished im-

mobility. A single big drop of rain, a drop enormous, pellucid and heavy—like a super-human tear coming straight and rapid from above, tearing its way through the sombre sky—struck loudly the dry ground between them in a starred splash. She wrung her hands in the bewilderment of the new and incomprehensible fear. The anguish of her whisper was more piercing than the shrillest cry.

“What punishment! Will you take him away then? Away from me? Listen to what I have done. . . . It is I who . . .”

“Ah!” exclaimed Lingard, who had been looking at the house.

“Don’t you believe her, Captain Lingard,” shouted Willems from the doorway, where he appeared with swollen eyelids and bared breast. He stood for a while, his hands grasping the lintels on each side of the door, and writhed about, glaring wildly, as if he had been crucified there. Then he made a sudden rush head foremost down the plankway that resounded with hollow, short noises to every footstep.

She heard him. A slight thrill passed on her face and the words that were on her lips fell back unspoken into her benighted heart; fell back amongst the mud, the stones—and the flowers, that are at the bottom of every heart.

21

WHEN he felt the solid ground of the courtyard under his feet, Willems pulled himself up in his headlong rush and moved forward with a moderate gait. He paced stiffly, looking with extreme exactitude at Lingard’s face; looking neither to the right nor to the left but at the face only, as if there was nothing in the world but those features familiar and dreaded; that white-haired, rough and severe head upon which he gazed in a fixed effort of his eyes, like a man trying to read small print at the full range of human vision. As soon as Willems’ feet had left the planks, the silence which had been lifted up by the jerky rattle of his footsteps fell down again upon the courtyard; the silence of the cloudy sky and of the windless air, the sullen silence of the earth oppressed by the aspect of coming turmoil, the silence of the world collecting its faculties to withstand the storm.

Through this silence Willems pushed his way, and stopped about six feet from Lingard. He stopped simply because he could go no further. He had started from the door with the reckless purpose of clapping the old fellow on the shoulder. He had no

idea that the man would turn out to be so tall, so big and so unapproachable. It seemed to him that he had never, never in his life, seen Lingard.

He tried to say—

“Do not believe . . .”

A fit of coughing checked his sentence in a faint splutter. Directly afterwards he swallowed—as it were—a couple of pebbles, throwing his chin up in the act; and Lingard, who looked at him narrowly, saw a bone, sharp and triangular like the head of a snake, dart up and down twice under the skin of his throat. Then that, too, did not move. Nothing moved.

“Well,” said Lingard, and with that word he came unexpectedly to the end of his speech. His hand in his pocket closed firmly round the butt of his revolver bulging his jacket on the hip, and he thought how soon and how quickly he could terminate his quarrel with that man who had been so anxious to deliver himself into his hands—and how inadequate would be that ending! He could not bear the idea of that man escaping from him by going out of life; escaping from fear, from doubt, from remorse into the peaceful certitude of death. He held him now. And he was not going to let him go—to let him disappear for ever in the faint blue smoke of a pistol shot. His anger grew within him. He felt a touch as of a burning hand on his heart. Not on the flesh of his breast, but a touch on his heart itself, on the palpitating and untiring particle of matter that responds to every emotion of the soul; that leaps with joy, with terror, or with anger.

He drew a long breath. He could see before him the bare chest of the man expanding and collapsing under the wide-open jacket. He glanced aside, and saw the bosom of the woman near him rise and fall in quick respirations that moved slightly up and down her hand, which was pressed to her breast, with all the fingers spread out and a little curved, as if grasping something too big for its span. And nearly a minute passed. One of those minutes when the voice is silenced, while the thoughts flutter in the head, like captive birds inside a cage, in rushes desperate, exhausting and vain.

During that minute of silence Lingard's anger kept rising, immense and towering, such as a crested wave running over the troubled shallows of the sands. Its roar filled his ears; a roar so powerful and distracting that, it seemed to him, his head must burst directly with the expanding volume of that sound. He looked at that man. That infamous figure upright on its feet, still, rigid, with stony eyes, as if its rotten soul had departed that moment and the carcass hadn't had the time yet to topple over

For the fraction of a second he had the illusion and the fear of the scoundrel having died there before the engaged glance of his eyes. Willems' eyelids fluttered, and the unconscious and passing tremor in that stiffly erect body exasperated Lingard like a fresh outrage. The fellow dared to stir! Dared to wink, to breathe, to exist; here, right before his eyes! His grip on the revolver relaxed gradually. As the transport of his rage increased, so also his contempt for the instruments that pierce or stab, that interpose themselves between the hand and the object of hate. He wanted another kind of satisfaction. Naked hands, by heaven! No fire-arms. Hands that could take him by the throat, beat down his defence, batter his face into shapeless flesh; hands that could feel all the desperation of his resistance and overpower it in the violent delight of a contact lingering and furious, intimate and brutal.

He let go the revolver altogether, stood hesitating, then throwing his hands out, strode forward—and everything passed from his sight. He could not see the man, the woman, the earth, the sky—saw nothing, as if in that one stride he had left the visible world behind to step into a black and deserted space. He heard screams round him in that obscurity, screams like the melancholy and pitiful cries of sea-birds that dwell on the lonely reefs of great oceans. Then suddenly a face appeared within a few inches of his own. His face. He felt something in his left hand. His throat . . . Ah! the thing like a snake's head that darts up and down . . . He squeezed hard. He was back in the world. He could see the quick beating of eyelids over a pair of eyes that were all whites, the grin of a drawn-up lip, a row of teeth gleaming through the drooping hair of a moustache . . . Strong white teeth. Knock them down his lying throat . . . He drew back his right hand, the fist up to the shoulder, knuckles out. From under his feet rose the screams of sea-birds. Thousands of them. Something held his legs . . . What the devil . . . He delivered his blow straight from the shoulder, felt the jar right up his arm, and realized suddenly that he was striking something passive and unresisting. His heart sank within him with disappointments, with rage, with mortification. He pushed with his left arm, opening the hand with haste, as if he had just perceived that he got hold by accident of something repulsive—and he watched with stupefied eyes Willems tottering backwards in groping strides, the white sleeve of his jacket across his face. He watched his distance from that man increase, while he remained motionless, without being able to account to himself for the fact that so much empty space had come in between them. It should have been the other way. They ought to have been very close, and . . .

Ah! He wouldn't fight, he wouldn't resist, he wouldn't defend himself! A cur! Evidently a cur! . . . He was amazed and aggrieved—profoundly—bitterly—with the immense and blank desolation of a small child robbed of a toy. He shouted—unbelieving:

“Will you be a cheat to the end?”

He waited for some answer. He waited anxiously with an impatience that seemed to lift him off his feet. He waited for some word, some sign; for some threatening stir. Nothing! Only two unwinking eyes glittered intently at him above the white sleeve. He saw the raised arm detach itself from the face and sink along the body. A white-clad arm, with a big stain on the white sleeve. A red stain. There was a cut on the cheek. It bled. The nose bled too. The blood ran down, made one moustache look like a dark rag stuck over the lip, and went on in a wet streak down the clipped beard on one side of the chin. A drop of blood hung on the end of some hairs that were glued together; it hung for a while and took a leap down on the ground. Many more followed, leaping one after another in close file. One alighted on the breast and glided down instantly with devious vivacity, like a small insect running away; it left a narrow dark track on the white skin. He looked at it, looked at the tiny and active drops, looked at what he had done, with obscure satisfaction, with anger, with regret. This wasn't much like an act of justice. He had a desire to go up nearer to the man, to hear him speak, to hear him say something atrocious and wicked that would justify the violence of the blow. He made an attempt to move, and became aware of a close embrace round both his legs, just above the ankles. Instinctively, he kicked out with his foot, broke through the close bond and felt at once the clasp transferred to his other leg; the clasp warm, desperate and soft, of human arms. He looked down bewildered. He saw the body of the woman stretched at length, flattened on the ground like a dark blue rag. She trailed face downwards, clinging to his leg with both arms in a tenacious hug. He saw the top of her head, the long black hair streaming over his foot, all over the beaten earth, around his boot. He couldn't see his foot for it. He heard the short and repeated moaning of her breath. He imagined the invisible face close to his heel. With one kick into that face he could free himself. He dared not stir, and shouted down—

“Let go! Let go! Let go!”

The only result of his shouting was a tightening of the pressure of her arms. With a tremendous effort he tried to bring his right foot up to his left, and succeeded partly. He heard distinctly the rub of her body on the ground as he jerked her along. He tried

to disengage himself by drawing up his foot. He stamped. He heard a voice saying sharply—

“Steady, Captain Lingard, steady!”

His eyes flew back to Willems at the sound of that voice, and, in the quick awakening of sleeping memories, Lingard stood suddenly still, appeased by the clear ring of familiar words. Appeased as in days of old, when they were trading together, when Willems was his trusted and helpful companion in out-of-the-way and dangerous places; when that fellow, who could keep his temper so much better than he could himself, had spared him many a difficulty, had saved him from many an act of hasty violence by the timely and good-humoured warning, whispered or shouted, “Steady, Captain Lingard, steady.” A smart fellow. He had brought him up. The smartest fellow in the islands. If he had only stayed with him, then all this . . . He called out to Willems—

“Tell her to let me go or . . .”

He heard Willems shouting something, waited for a while, then glanced vaguely down and saw the woman still stretched out perfectly mute and unstirring, with her head at his feet. He felt a nervous impatience that, somehow, resembled fear.

“Tell her to let go, to go away, Willems, I tell you. I’ve had enough of this,” he cried.

“All right, Captain Lingard,” answered the calm voice of Willems, “she has let go. Take your foot off her hair; she can’t get up.”

Lingard leaped aside, clean away, and spun round quickly. He saw her sit up and cover her face with both hands, then he turned slowly on his heel and looked at the man. Willems held himself very straight, but was unsteady on his feet, and moved about nearly on the same spot, like a t.psy man attempting to preserve his balance.

After gazing at him for a while, Lingard called, rancorous and irritable—

“What have you got to say for yourself?”

Willems began to walk towards him. He walked slowly, reeling a little before he took each step, and Lingard saw him put his hand to his face, then look at it holding it up to his eyes, as if he had there, concealed in the hollow of the palm, some small object which he wanted to examine secretly. Suddenly he drew it, with a brusque movement, down the front of his jacket, and left a long smudge.

“That’s a fine thing to do,” said Willems.

He stood in front of Lingard, one of his eyes sunk deep in the increasing swelling of his cheek, still repeating mechanically the

movement of feeling his damaged face; and every time he did this he pressed the palm to some clean spot on his jacket, covering the white cotton with bloody imprints as of some deformed and monstrous hand. Lingard said nothing, looking on. At last Willems left off staunching the blood and stood, his arms hanging by his side, with his face stiff and distorted under the patches of coagulated blood; and he seemed as though he had been set up there for a warning: an incomprehensible figure marked all over with some awful and symbolic signs of deadly import. Speaking with difficulty, he repeated in a reproachful tone—

“That was a fine thing to do.”

“After all,” answered Lingard, bitterly, “I had too good an opinion of you.”

“And I of you. Don’t you see that I could have had that fool over there killed and the whole thing burnt to the ground, swept off the face of the earth. You wouldn’t have found as much as a heap of ashes had I liked. I could have done all that. And I wouldn’t.”

“You—could—not. You dared not. You scoundrel!” cried Lingard.

“What’s the use of calling me names?”

“True,” retorted Lingard—“there’s no name bad enough for you.”

There was a short interval of silence. At the sound of their rapidly exchanged words, Aïssa had got up from the ground where she had been sitting, in a sorrowful and dejected pose, and approached the two men. She stood on one side and looked on cagerly, in a desperate effort of her brain, with the quick and distracted eyes of a person trying for her life to penetrate the meaning of sentences uttered in a foreign tongue: the meaning portentous and fateful that lurks in the sounds of mysterious words; in the sounds surprising, unknown and strange.

Willems let the last speech of Lingard pass by; seemed by a slight movement of his hand to help it on its way to join the other shadows of the past. Then he said.—

“You have struck me; you have insulted me . . .”

“Insulted you!” interrupted Lingard, passionately. “Who—what can insult you . . . you . . .”

He choked, advanced a step.

“Steady! steady!” said Willems calmly. “I tell you I sha’n’t fight. Is it clear enough to you that I sha’n’t?—I—shall—not—lift—a—finger.”

As he spoke, slowly punctuating each word with a slight jerk of his head, he stared at Lingard, his right eye open and big, the left small and nearly closed by the swelling of one half of his face,

that appeared all drawn out on one side like faces seen in a concave glass. And they stood exactly opposite each other: one tall, slight and disfigured; the other tall, heavy and severe.

Willems went on—

"If I had wanted to hurt you—if I had wanted to destroy you, it was easy. I stood in the doorway long enough to pull a trigger—and you know I shoot straight."

"You would have missed," said Lingard, with assurance. "There is, under heaven, such a thing as justice."

The sound of that word on his own lips made him pause, confused, like an unexpected and unanswerable rebuke. The anger of his outraged pride, the anger of his outraged heart, had gone out in the blow; and there remained nothing but the sense of some immense infamy—of something vague, disgusting and terrible, which seemed to surround him on all sides, hover about him with shadowy and stealthy movements, like a band of assassins in the darkness of vast and unsafe places. Was there, under heaven, such a thing as justice? He looked at the man before him with such an intensity of prolonged glance that he seemed to see right through him, that at last he saw but a floating and unsteady mist in human shape. Would it blow away before the first breath of the breeze and leave nothing behind?

The sound of Willems' voice made him start violently. Willems was saying—

"I have always led a virtuous life; you know I have. You always praised me for my steadiness; you know you have. You know also I never stole—if that's what you're thinking of. I borrowed. You know how much I repaid. It was an error of judgment. But then consider my position there. I had been a little unlucky in my private affairs, and had debts. Could I let myself go under before the eyes of all those men who envied me? But that's all over. It was an error of judgment. I've paid for it. An error of judgment."

Lingard, astounded into perfect stillness, looked down. He looked down at Willems' bare feet. Then, as the other had paused, he repeated in a blank tone—

"An error of judgment . . ."

"Yes," drawled out Willems, thoughtfully, and went on with increasing animation: "As I said, I have always led a virtuous life. More so than Hudig—than you. Yes, than you. I drank a little, I played cards a little. Who doesn't? But I had principles from a boy. Yes, principles. Business is business, and I never was an ass. I never respected fools. They had to suffer for their folly when they dealt with me. The evil was in them, not in me. But as to principles, it's another matter. I kept clear of women. It's

forbidden—I had no time—and I despised them. Now I hate them!”

He put his tongue out a little; a tongue whose pink and moist end ran here and there, like something independently alive, under his swollen and blackened lips; he touched with the tips of his fingers the cut on his cheek, felt all round it with precaution: and the unharmed side of his face appeared for a moment to be preoccupied and uneasy about the state of that other side which was so very sore and stiff.

He recommenced speaking, and his voice vibrated as though with repressed emotion of some kind.

“You ask my wife, when you see her in Macassar, whether I have no reason to hate her. She was nobody, and I made her Mrs. Willems. A half-caste girl! You ask her how she showed her gratitude to me. You ask . . . Never mind that. Well, you came and dumped me here like a load of rubbish; dumped me here and left me with nothing to do—nothing good to remember—and damn little to hope for. You left me here at the mercy of that fool, Almayer, who suspected me of something. Of what? Devil only knows. But he suspected and hated me from the first; I suppose because you befriended me. Oh! I could read him like a book. He isn’t very deep, your Sambir partner, Captain Lingard, but he knows how to be disagreeable. Months passed. I thought I would die of sheer weariness, of my thoughts, of my regrets. And then . . .”

He made a quick step nearer to Lingard, and as if moved by the same thought, by the same instinct, by the impulse of his will, Aïssa also stepped nearer to them. They stood in a close group, and the two men could feel the calm air between their faces stirred by the light breath of the anxious woman who enveloped them both in the uncomprehending, in the despairing and wondering glances of her wild and mournful eyes.

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WILLEMS turned a little from her and spoke lower. “Look at that,” he said, with an almost imperceptible movement of his head towards the woman to whom he was presenting his shoulder. “Look at that! Don’t believe her! What has she been saying to you? What? I have been asleep. Had to sleep at last. I’ve been waiting for you three days and nights. I had to sleep some time. Hadn’t I? I told her to remain awake and watch for you, and call me at once. She did watch.

You can't believe her. You can't believe any woman. Who can tell what's inside their heads? No one. You can know nothing. The only thing you can know is that it isn't anything like what comes through their lips. They live by the side of you. They seem to hate you, or they seem to love you; they caress or torment you; they throw you over or stick to you closer than your skin for some inscrutable and awful reason of their own—which you can never know! Look at her—and look at me. At me!—her infernal work. What has she been saying?"

His voice had sunk to a whisper. Lingard listened with great attention, holding his chin in his hand, which grasped a great handful of his white beard. His elbow was in the palm of his other hand, and his eyes were still fixed on the ground. He murmured, without looking up—

"She begged me for your life—if you want to know—as if the thing were worth giving or taking!"

"And for three days she begged me to take yours," said Willems quickly. "For three days she wouldn't give me any peace. She was never still. She planned ambushes. She has been looking for places all over here where I could hide and drop you with a safe shot as you walked up. It's true. I give you my word."

"Your word," muttered Lingard, contemptuously.

Willems took no notice.

"Ah! She is a ferocious creature," he went on. "You don't know . . . I wanted to pass the time—to do something—to have something to think about—to forget my troubles till you came back. And . . . look at her . . . she took me as if I did not belong to myself. She did. I did not know there was something in me she could get hold of. She, a savage. I, a civilized European, and clever! She that knew no more than a wild animal! Well, she found out something in me. She found it out, and I was lost. I knew it. She tormented me. I was ready to do anything. I resisted—but I was ready. I knew that too. That frightened me more than anything; more than my own sufferings; and that was frightful enough, I assure you."

Lingard listened, fascinated and amazed like a child listening to a fairy tale, and, when Willems stopped for breath, he shuffled his feet a little.

"What does he say?" cried out Aïssa, suddenly.

The two men looked at her quickly, and then looked at one another.

Willems began again, speaking hurriedly—

"I tried to do something. Take her away from those people. I went to Almayer; the biggest blind fool that you ever . . . Then Abdulla came—and she went away. She took away with

her something of me which I had to get back. I had to do it. As far as you are concerned, the change here had to happen sooner or later; you couldn't be master here for ever. It isn't what I have done that torments me. It is the why. It's the madness that drove me to it. It's that thing that came over me. That may come again, some day."

"It will do no harm to anybody then, I promise you," said Lingard, significantly.

Willems looked at him for a second with a blank stare, then went on—

"I fought against her. She goaded me to violence and to murder. Nobody knows why. She pushed me to it persistently, desperately, all the time. Fortunately Abdulla had sense. I don't know what I wouldn't have done. She held me then. Held me like a nightmare that is terrible and sweet. By and by it was another life. I woke up. I found myself beside an animal as full of harm as a wild cat. You don't know through what I have passed. Her father tried to kill me—and she very nearly killed him. I believe she would have stuck at nothing. I don't know which was more terrible! She would have stuck at nothing to defend her own. And when I think that it was me—me—Willems . . . I hate her. To-morrow she may want my life. How can I know what's in her? She may want to kill me next!"

He paused in great trepidation, then added in a scared tone—

"I don't want to die here."

"Don't you?" said Lingard, thoughtfully.

Willems turned towards Aïssa and pointed at her with a bony forefinger.

"Look at her! Always there. Always near. Always watching, watching . . . for something. Look at her eyes. Ain't they big? Don't they stare? You wouldn't think she can shut them like human beings do. I don't believe she ever does. I go to sleep, if I can, under their stare, and when I wake up I see them fixed on me and moving no more than the eyes of a corpse. While I am still they are still. By God—she can't move them till I stir, and then they follow me like a pair of jailers. They watch me; when I stop they seem to wait patient and glistening till I am off my guard—for to do something. To do something horrible. Look at them! You can see nothing in them. They are big, menacing—and empty. The eyes of a savage; of a damned mongrel, half-Arab, half-Malay. They hurt me! I am white! I swear to you I can't stand this! Take me away. I am white! All white!"

He shouted towards the sombre heaven, proclaiming desper-

ately under the frown of thickening clouds the fact of his pure and superior descent. He shouted, his head thrown up, his arms swinging about wildly; lean, ragged, disfigured; a tall madman making a great disturbance about something invisible; a being absurd, repulsive, pathetic, and droll. Lingard, who was looking down as if absorbed in deep thought, gave him a quick glance from under his eyebrows; Aïssa stood with clasped hands. At the other end of the courtyard the old woman, like a vague and decrepit apparition, rose noiselessly to look, then sank down again with a stealthy movement and crouched low over the small glow of the fire. Willems' voice filled the enclosure, rising louder with every word, and then, suddenly, at its very loudest, stopped short—like water stops running from an over-turned vessel. As soon as it had ceased the thunder seemed to take up the burden in a low growl coming from the inland hills. The noise approached in confused mutterings which kept on increasing, swelling into a roar that came nearer, rushed down the river, passed close in a tearing crash—and instantly sounded faint, dying away in monotonous and dull repetitions amongst the endless sinuosities of the lower reaches. Over the great forests, over all the innumerable people of unstirring trees—over all that living people immense, motionless, and mute—the silence, that had rushed in on the track of the passing tumult, remained suspended as deep and complete as if it had never been disturbed from the beginning of remote ages. Then, through it, after a time, came to Lingard's ears the voice of the running river: a voice low, discreet, and sad, like the persistent and gentle voices that speak of the past in the silence of dreams.

He felt a great emptiness in his heart. It seemed to him that there was within his breast a great space without any light, where his thoughts wandered forlornly, unable to escape, unable to rest, unable to die, to vanish—and to relieve him from the fearful oppression of their existence. Speech, action, anger, forgiveness, all appeared to him alike useless and vain, appeared to him unsatisfactory, not worth the effort of hand or brain that was needed to give them effect. He could not see why he should not remain standing there, without ever doing anything, to the end of time. He felt something, something like a heavy chain, that held him there. This wouldn't do. He backed away a little from Willems and Aïssa, leaving them close together, then stopped and looked at both. The man and the woman appeared to him much further than they really were. He had made only about three steps backward, but he believed for a moment that another step would take him out of earshot for ever. They appeared to him slightly under life size, and with a great cleanness of outlines, like

figures carved with great precision of detail and highly finished by a skilful hand. He pulled himself together. The strong consciousness of his own personality came back to him. He had a notion of surveying them from a great and inaccessible height.

He said slowly: "You have been possessed of a devil."

"Yes," answered Willems gloomily, and looking at Aïssa. "Isn't it pretty?"

"I've heard this kind of talk before," said Lingard, in a scornful tone; then paused, and went on steadily after a while: "I regret nothing. I picked you up by the waterside, like a starving cat—by God. I regret nothing; nothing that I have done. Abdulla—twenty others—no doubt Hudig himself, were after me. That's business—for them. But that you should . . . Money belongs to him who picks it up and is strong enough to keep it—but this thing was different. It was part of my life. . . . I am an old fool."

He was. The breath of his words, of the very words he spoke, fanned the spark of divine folly in his breast, the spark that made him—the hard-headed, heavy-handed adventurer—stand out from the crowd, from the sordid, from the joyous, unscrupulous, and noisy crowd of men that were so much like himself.

Willems said hurriedly: "It wasn't me. The evil was not in me, Captain Lingard."

"And where else—confound you! Where else?" interrupted Lingard, raising his voice. "Did you ever see me cheat and lie and steal? Tell me that. Did you? Hey? I wonder where in perdition you came from when I found you under my feet. . . . No matter. You will do no more harm."

Willems moved nearer, gazing upon him anxiously. Lingard went on with distinct deliberation—

"What did you expect when you asked me to see you? What? You know me. I am Lingard. You lived with me. You've heard me speak. You knew what you had done. Well! What did you expect?"

"How can I know?" groaned Willems, wringing his hands; "I was alone in that infernal savage crowd. I was delivered into their hands. After the thing was done, I felt so lost and weak that I would have called the devil himself to my aid if it had been any good—if he hadn't put in all his work already. In the whole world there was only one man that had ever cared for me. Only one white man. You! Hate is better than being alone! Death is better! I expected . . . anything. Something to expect. Something to take me out of this. Out of her sight!"

He laughed. His laugh seemed to be torn out from him against his will, seemed to be brought violently on the surface from under

his bitterness, his self-contempt, from under his despairing wonder at his own nature.

"When I think that when I first knew her it seemed to me that my whole life wouldn't be enough to . . . And now when I look at her! She did it all. I must have been mad. I was mad. Everytime I look at her I remember my madness. It frightens me. . . . And when I think that of all my life, of all my past, of all my future, of my intelligence, of my work, there is nothing left but she, the cause of my ruin, and you whom I have mortally offended . . ."

He hid his face for a moment in his hands, and when he took them away he had lost the appearance of comparative calm and gave way to a wild distress.

"Captain Lingard . . . anything . . . a deserted island . . . anywhere . . . I promise . . ."

"Shut up!" shouted Lingard, roughly.

He became dumb, suddenly, completely.

The wan light of the clouded morning retired slowly from the courtyard, from the clearings, from the river, as if it had gone unwillingly to hide in the enigmatical solitudes of the gloomy and silent forests. The clouds over their heads thickened into a low vault of uniform blackness. The air was still and inexpressibly oppressive.

Lingard unbuttoned his jacket, flung it wide open and, inclining his body sideways a little, wiped his forehead with his hand, which he jerked sharply afterwards. Then he looked at Willems and said—

"No promise of yours is any good to me. I am going to take your conduct into my own hands. Pay attention to what I am going to say. You are my prisoner."

Willems' head moved imperceptibly; then he became rigid and still. He seemed not to breathe.

"You shall stay here," continued Lingard, with sombre deliberation. "You are not fit to go amongst people. Who could suspect, who could guess, who could imagine what's in you? I couldn't! You are my mistake. I shall hide you here. If I let you out you would go amongst unsuspecting men, and lie, and steal, and cheat for a little money or for some woman. I don't care about shooting you, It would be the safest way though. But I won't. Do not expect me to forgive you. To forgive one must have been angry and become contemptuous, and there is nothing in me now—no anger, no contempt, no disappointment. To me you are not Willems, the man I befriended and helped through thick and thin, and thought much of . . . You are not a human being that may be destroyed or forgiven. You are a

bitter thought, a something without a body and that must be hidden . . . You are my shame."

He ceased and looked slowly round. How dark it was! It seemed to him that the light was dying prematurely out of the world and that the air was already dead.

"Of course," he went on, "I shall see to it that you don't starve."

"You don't mean to say that I must live here, Captain Lingard?" said Willems, in a kind of mechanical voice without any inflections.

"Did you ever hear me say something I did not mean?" asked Lingard. "You said you didn't want to die here—well, you must live . . . Unless you change your mind," he added, as if in involuntary afterthought.

He looked at Willems narrowly, then shook his head.

"You are alone," he went on. "Nothing can help you. Nobody will. You are neither white nor brown. You have no colour as you have no heart. Your accomplices have abandoned you to me because I am still somebody to be reckoned with. You are alone but for that woman there. You say you did this for her. Well, you have her."

Willems mumbled something, and then suddenly caught his hair with both his hands and remained standing so. Aissa, who had been looking at him, turned to Lingard.

"What did you say, Rajah Laut?" she cried.

There was a slight stir amongst the filmy threads of her disordered hair, the bushes by the river sides trembled, the big tree nodded precipitately over them with an abrupt rustle, as if waking with a start from a troubled sleep—and the breath of hot breeze passed, light, rapid, and scorching, under the clouds that whirled round, unbroken but undulating, like a restless phantom of a sombre sea.

Lingard looked at her pityingly before he said—

"I have told him that he must live here all his life . . . and with you."

The sun seemed to have gone out at last like a flickering light away up beyond the clouds, and in the stifling gloom of the courtyard the three figures stood colourless and shadowy, as if surrounded by a black and superheated mist. Aissa looked at Willems, who remained still, as though he had been changed into stone in the very act of tearing his hair. Then she turned her head towards Lingard and shouted—

"You lie! You lie! . . . White man. Like you all do. You . . . whom Abdulla made small. You lie!"

Her words rang out shrill and venomous with her secret scorn,

with her overpowering desire to wound regardless of consequences; in her woman's reckless desire to cause suffering at any cost, to cause it by the sound of her own voice—by her own voice, that would carry the poison of her thought into the hated heart.

Willems let his hands fall, and began to mumble again. Lingard turned his ear towards him instinctively, caught something that sounded like "Very well"—then some more mumbling—then a sigh.

"As far as the rest of the world is concerned," said Lingard, after waiting for a while in an attentive attitude, "your life is finished. Nobody will be able to throw any of your villainies in my teeth; nobody will be able to point at you and say, 'Here goes a scoundrel of Lingard's up-bringing.' You are buried here."

"And you think that I will stay . . . that I will submit?" exclaimed Willems, as if he had suddenly recovered the power of speech.

"You needn't stay here—on this spot," said Lingard, drily. "There are the forests—and here is the river. You may swim. Fifteen miles up, or forty down. At one end you will meet Almayer, at the other the sea. Take your choice."

He burst into a short, joyless laugh, then added with severe gravity—

"There is also another way."

"If you want to drive my soul into damnation by trying to drive me to suicide you will not succeed," said Willems in wild excitement. "I will live. I shall repent. I may escape. . . . Take that woman away—she is sin."

A hooked dart of fire tore in two the darkness of the distant horizon and lit up the gloom of the earth with a dazzling and ghastly flame. Then the thunder was heard far away, like an incredibly enormous voice muttering menaces.

Lingard said—

"I don't care what happens, but I may tell you that without that woman your life is not worth much—not twopence. There is a fellow here who . . . and Abdulla himself wouldn't stand on any ceremony. Think of that! And then she won't go."

He began, even while he spoke, to walk slowly down towards the little gate. He didn't look, but he felt as sure that Willems was following him as if he had been leading him by a string. Directly he had passed through the wicket-gate into the big courtyard he heard a voice, behind his back, saying—

"I think she was right. I ought to have shot you. I couldn't have been worse off."

"Time yet," answered Lingard, without stopping or looking

back. "But, you see, you can't. There is not even that in you."

"Don't provoke me, Captain Lingard," cried Willems.

Lingard turned round sharply. Willems and Aïssa stopped. Another forked flash of lightning split up the clouds over head, and threw upon their faces a sudden burst of light—a blaze violent, sinister and fleeting; and in the same instant they were deafened by a near, single crash of thunder, which was followed by a rushing noise, like a frightened sigh of the startled earth.

"Provoke you!" said the old adventurer, as soon as he could make himself heard. "Provoke you! Hey! What's there in you to provoke? What do I care?"

"It is easy to speak like that when you know that in the whole world—in the whole world—I have no friend," said Willems.

"Whose fault?" said Lingard, sharply.

Their voices, after the deep and tremendous noise, sounded to them very unsatisfactory—thin and frail, like the voices of pigmies—and they became suddenly silent, as if on that account. From up the courtyard Lingard's boatmen came down and passed them, keeping step in a single file, their paddles on shoulder, and holding their heads straight with their eyes fixed on the river. Ali, who was walking last, stopped before Lingard, very stiff and up-right. He said—

"That one-eyed Babalatchi is gone, with all his women. He took everything. All the pots and boxes. Big. Heavy. Three boxes."

He grinned as if the thing had been amusing, then added with an appearance of anxious concern, "Rain coming."

"We return," said Lingard. "Make ready."

"Aye, aye, sir!" ejaculated Ali with precision, and moved on. He had been quartermaster with Lingard before making up his mind to stay in Sambir as Almayer's head man. He strutted towards the landing-place thinking proudly that he was not like those other ignorant boatmen, and knew how to answer properly the very greatest of white captains.

"You have misunderstood me from the first, Captain Lingard," said Willems.

"Have I? It's all right, as long as there is no mistake about my meaning," answered Lingard, strolling slowly to the landing-place. Willems followed him, and Aïssa followed Willems.

Two hands were extended to help Lingard in embarking. He stepped cautiously and heavily into the long and narrow canoe, and sat in the canvas folding-chair that had been placed in the middle. He leaned back and turned his head to the two figures that stood on the bank a little above him. Aïssa's eyes were fastened on his face in a visible impatience to see him gone.

Willems' look went straight above the canoe, straight at the forest on the other side of the river.

"All right, Ali," said Lingard, in a low voice.

A slight stir animated the faces, and a faint murmur ran along the line of paddlers. The foremost man pushed with the point of his paddle, canted the fore end out of the dead water into the current; and the canoe fell rapidly off before the rush of brown water, the stern rubbing gently against the low bank.

"We shall meet again, Captain Lingard!" cried Willems, in an unsteady voice.

"Never!" said Lingard, turning half round in his chair to look at Willems. His fierce red eyes glittered remorselessly over the high back of his seat.

"Must cross the river. Water less quick over there," said Ali.

He pushed in his turn now with all his strength, throwing his body recklessly right out over the stern. Then he recovered himself just in time into the squatting attitude of a monkey perched on a high shelf, and shouted: "Dayong!"

The paddles struck the water together. The canoe darted forward and went on steadily crossing the river with a sideways motion made up of its own speed and the downward drift of the current.

Lingard watched the shore astern. The woman shook her hand at him, and then squatted at the feet of the man who stood motionless. After a while she got up and stood beside him, reaching up to his head—and Lingard saw then that she had wetted some part of her covering and was trying to wash the dried blood off the man's immovable face, which did not seem to know anything about it. Lingard turned away and threw himself back in his chair, stretching his legs out with a sigh of fatigue. His head fell forward; and under his red face the white beard lay fan-like on his breast, the ends of fine long hairs all astir in the faint draught made by the rapid motion of the craft that carried him away from his prisoner—from the only thing in his life he wished to hide.

In its course across the river the canoe came into the line of Willems' sight and his eyes caught the image, followed it eagerly as it glided, small but distinct, on the dark background of the forest. He could see plainly the figure of the man sitting in the middle. All his life he had felt that man behind his back, a reassuring presence ready with help, with commendation, with advice; friendly in reproof, enthusiastic in approbation; a man inspiring confidence by his strength, by his fearlessness, by the very weakness of his simple heart. And now that man was going away. He must call him back.

He shouted, and his words, which he wanted to throw across the river, seemed to fall helplessly at his feet. Aïssa put her hand on his arm in a restraining attempt, but he shook it off. He wanted to call back his very life that was going away from him. He shouted again—and this time he did not even hear himself. No use. He would never return. And he stood in sullen silence looking at the white figure over there, lying back in the chair in the middle of the boat; a figure that struck him suddenly as very terrible, heartless and astonishing, with its unnatural appearance of running over the water in an attitude of languid repose.

For a time nothing on earth stirred, seemingly, but the canoe, which glided up-stream with a motion so even and smooth that it did not convey any sense of movement. Overhead, the massed clouds appeared solid and steady as if held there in a powerful grip, but on their uneven surface there was a continuous and trembling glimmer, a faint reflection of the distant lightning from the thunderstorm that had broken already on the coast and was working its way up the river with low and angry growls. Willerns looked on, as motionless as everything round him and above him. Only his eyes seemed to live, as they followed the canoe on its course that carried it away from him, steadily, unhesitatingly, finally, as if it were going, not up the great river into the momentous excitement of Sambir, but straight into the past, into the past crowded yet empty, like an old cemetery full of neglected graves, where lie dead hopes that never return.

From time to time he felt on his face the passing, warm touch of an immense breath coming from beyond the forest, like the short panting of an oppressed world. Then the heavy air round him was pierced by a sharp gust of wind, bringing with it the fresh, damp feel of the falling rain; and all the innumerable tree-tops of the forests swayed to the left and sprang back again in a tumultuous balancing of nodding branches and shuddering leaves. A light frown ran over the river, the clouds stirred slowly, changing their aspect but not their place, as if they had turned ponderously over; and when the sudden movement had died out in a quickened tremor of the slenderest twigs, there was a short period of formidable immobility above and below, during which the voice of the thunder was heard, speaking in a sustained, emphatic and vibrating roll, with violent louder bursts of crashing sound, like a wrathful and threatening discourse of an angry god. For a moment it died out, and then another gust of wind passed, driving before it a white mist which filled the space with a cloud of water-dust that hid suddenly from Willerns the canoe, the forests, the river itself; that woke him up from his numbness in a forlorn shiver, that made him look round despairingly to see

nothing but the whirling drift of rain spray before the freshening breeze, while through it the heavy big drops fell about him with sonorous and rapid beats upon the dry earth. He made a few hurried steps up the courtyard and was arrested by an immense sheet of water that fell all at once on him, fell sudden and overwhelming from the clouds, cutting his respiration, streaming over his head, clinging to him, running down his body, off his arms, off his legs. He stood gasping while the water beat him in a vertical downpour, drove on him slanting in squalls, and he felt the drops striking him from above, from everywhere; drops thick, pressed and dashing at him as if flung from all sides by a mob of infuriated hands. From under his feet a great vapour of broken water floated up, he felt the ground become soft—melt under him—and saw the water spring out from the dry earth to meet the water that fell from the sombre heaven. An insane dread took possession of him, the dread of all that water around him, of the water that ran down the courtyard towards him, of the water that pressed him on every side of the slanting water that drove across his face in wavering sheets which gleamed pale red with the flicker of lightning streaming through them, as if fire and water were falling together, monstrosly mixed, upon the stunned earth.

He wanted to run away, but when he moved it was to slide about painfully and slowly upon that earth which had become mud so suddenly under his feet. He fought his way up the courtyard like a man pushing through a crowd, his head down, one shoulder forward, stopping often, and sometimes carried back a pace or two in the rush of water which his heart was not stout enough to face. Aïssa followed him step by step, stopping when he stopped, recoiling with him, moving forward with him in his toilsome way up the slippery declivity of the courtyard, of that courtyard, from which everything seemed to have been swept away by the first rush of the mighty downpour. They could see nothing. The tree, the bushes, the house, and the fences—all had disappeared in the thickness of the falling rain. Their hair stuck, streaming, to their heads; their clothing clung to them, beaten close to their bodies; water ran off them, off their heads, over their shoulders. They moved, patient, upright, slow and dark, in the gleam clear or fiery of the falling drops, under the roll of unceasing thunder, like two wandering ghosts of the drowned that, condemned to haunt the water for ever, had come up from the river to look at the world under a deluge.

On the left the tree seemed to step out to meet them, appearing vaguely, high, motionless and patient; with a rustling plaint of its innumerable leaves through which every drop of water tore

its separate way with cruel haste. And then, to the right, the house surged up in the mist, very black, and clamorous with the quick patter of rain on its high-pitched roof above the steady splash of the water running off the eaves. Down the plankway leading to the door flowed a thin and pellucid stream, and when Willems began his ascent it broke over his foot as if he were going up a steep ravine in the bed of a rapid and shallow torrent. Behind his heels two streaming smudges of mud stained for an instant the purity of the rushing water, and then he splashed his way up with a spurt and stood on the bamboo platform before the open door under the shelter of the overhanging eaves--under shelter at last!

A low moan ending in a broken and plaintive mutter arrested Willems on the threshold. He peered round in the half-light under the roof and saw the old woman crouching close to the wall in a shapeless heap, and while he looked he felt a touch of two arms on his shoulders. Aïssa! He had forgotten her. He turned, and she clasped him round the neck instantly, pressing close to him as if afraid of violence or escape. He stiffened himself in repulsion, in horror, in the mysterious revolt of his heart; while she clung to him--clung to him as if he were a refuge from misery, from storm, from weariness, from fear, from despair; and it was on the part of that being an embrace terrible, enraged and mournful, in which all her strength went out to make him captive, to hold him for ever.

He said nothing. He looked into her eyes while he struggled with her fingers about the nape of his neck, and suddenly he tore her hands apart, holding her arms up in a strong grip of her wrists, and bending his swollen face close over hers, he said--

"It is all your doing. You . . ."

She did not understand him--not a word. He spoke in the language of his people--of his people that know no mercy and no shame. And he was angry. Alas! he was always angry now, and always speaking words that she could not understand. She stood in silence, looking at him through her patient eyes, while he shook her arms a little and then flung them down.

"Don't follow me!" he shouted. "I want to be alone--I mean to be left alone!"

He went in, leaving the door open.

She did not move. What need to understand the words when they are spoken in such a voice? In that voice which did not seem to be his voice--his voice when he spoke by the brook, when he was never angry and always smiling! Her eyes were fixed upon the dark doorway, but her hands strayed mechanically upwards; she took up all her hair, and, inclining her head slightly

over her shoulder, wrung out the long black tresses, twisting them persistently, while she stood, sad and absorbed, like one listening to an inward voice—the voice of bitter, of unavailing regret. The thunder had ceased, the wind had died out, and the rain fell perpendicular and steady through a great pale clearness—the light of remote sun coming victorious from amongst the dissolving blackness of the clouds. She stood near the doorway. He was there—alone in the gloom of the dwelling. He was there. He spoke not. What was in his mind now? What fear? What desire? Not the desire of her as in the days when he used to smile . . . How could she know? . . .

A sigh coming from the bottom of her heart, flew out into the world through her parted lips. A sigh faint, profound, and broken; a sigh full of pain and fear, like the sigh of those who are about to face the unknown; to face it in loneliness, in doubt, and without hope. She let go her hair, that fell scattered over her shoulders like a funeral veil, and she sank down suddenly by the door. Her hands clasped her ankles; she rested her head on her drawn-up knees, and remained still, very still, under the streaming mourning of her hair. She was thinking of him; of the days by the brook; she was thinking of all that had been their love—and she sat in the abandoned posture of those who sit weeping by the dead, of those who watch and mourn over a corpse.

PART FIVE

23

ALMAYER propped, alone on the verandah of his house, with both his elbows on the table, and holding his head between his hands, stared before him, away over the stretch of sprouting young grass in his courtyard, and over the short jetty with its cluster of small canoes, amongst which his big whale-boat floated high, like a white mother of all that dark and aquatic brood. He stared on the river, past the schooner anchored in mid-stream, past the forests of the left bank; he stared through and past the illusion of the material world.

The sun was sinking. Under the sky was stretched a network of white threads, a network fine and closeshed, where here and there were caught thicker white vapours of globular shape; and to the eastward, above the ragged barrier of the forests, surged the summits of a chain of great clouds, growing bigger slowly, in imperceptible motion, as if careful not to disturb the glowing stillness of the earth and of the sky. Abreast of the house the river was empty but for the motionless schooner. Higher up, a solitary log came out from the bend above and went on drifting slowly down the straight reach: a dead and wandering tree going out to its grave in the sea, between two ranks of trees motionless and living.

And Almayer sat, his face in his hands, looking on and hating all this: the muddy river; the faded blue of the sky; the black log passing by on its first and last voyage; the green sea of leaves—the sea that glowed, shimmered, and stirred above the uniform and impenetrable gloom of the forests—the joyous sea of living green powdered with the brilliant dust of oblique sunrays. He hated all this; he begrudged every day—every minute—of his life spent amongst all these things; he begrudged it bitterly, angrily, with enraged and immense regret, like a miser compelled to give up some of his treasure to a near relation. And yet all this was very precious to him. It was the present sign of a splendid future.

He pushed the table away impatiently, got up, made a few steps aimlessly, then stood by the balustrade and again looked at the river—at that river which would have been the instrument for the making of his fortune if . . . if . . .

“What an abominable brute!” he said.

He was alone, but he spoke aloud, as one is apt to do under the impulse of a strong, of an overmastering thought.

"What a brute!" he muttered again.

The river was dark now, and the schooner lay on it, a black, a lonely, and a graceful form, with the slender masts darting upwards from it in two frail and raking lines. The shadows of the evening crept up the trees, crept up from bough to bough, till at last the long sunbeams coursing from the western horizon skimmed lightly over the topmost branches, then flew upwards amongst the piled-up clouds, giving them a sombre and fiery aspect in the last flush of light. And suddenly the light disappeared as if lost in the immensity of the great blue, and empty hollow overhead. The sun had set: and the forests became a straight wall of formless blackness. Above them, on the edge of lingering clouds, a single star glimmered fitfully, obscured now and then by the rapid flight of high and invisible vapours.

Almayer fought with the uneasiness within his breast. He heard Ali, who moved behind him preparing his evening meal, and he listened with strange attention to the sounds the man made—to the short, dry bang of the plate put upon the table, to the clink of glass and the metallic rattle of knife and fork. The man went away. Now he was coming back. He would speak directly; and Almayer, notwithstanding the absorbing gravity of his thoughts, listened for the sound of expected words. He heard them, spoken in English with painstaking distinctness.

"Ready, sir!"

"All right," said Almayer, curtly. He did not move. He remained pensive, with his back to the table upon which stood the lighted lamp brought by Ali. He was thinking: Where was Lingard now? Halfway down the river probably, in Abdulla's ship. He would be back in about three days—perhaps less. And then? Then the schooner would have to be got out of the river, and when that craft was gone they—he and Lingard—would remain here; alone with the constant thought of that other man, that other man living near them! What an extraordinary idea to keep him there for ever. For ever! What did that mean—for ever? Perhaps a year, perhaps ten years. Preposterous! Keep him there ten years—or may be twenty! The fellow was capable of living more than twenty years. And for all that time he would have to be watched, fed, looked after. There was nobody but Lingard to have such notions. Twenty years! Why, no! In less than ten years their fortune would be made and they would leave this place, first for Batavia—yes, Batavia—and then for Europe. England, no doubt. Lingard would want to go to England. And would they leave that man here? How would that

fellow look in ten years? Very old probably. Well, devil take him. Nina would be fifteen. She would be rich and very pretty and he himself would not be so old then. . . .

Almayer smiled into the night.

. . . Yes, rich! Why! Of course! Captain Lingard was a resourceful man, and he had plenty of money even now. They were rich already; but not enough. Decidedly not enough. Money brings money. That gold business was good. Famous! Captain Lingard was a remarkable man. He said the gold was there—and it was there. Lingard knew what he was talking about. But he had queer ideas. For instance, about Willems. Now what did he want to keep him alive for? Why?

“That scoundrel,” muttered Almayer again.

“Makan Tuan!” ejaculated Ali suddenly, very loud in a pressing tone.

Almayer walked to the table, sat down, and his anxious visage dropped from above into the light thrown down by the lampshade. He helped himself absently, and began to eat in great mouthfuls.

. . . Undoubtedly, Lingard was the man to stick to! The man undismayed, masterful and ready. How quickly he had planned a new future when Willems’ treachery destroyed their established position in Sambir! And the position even now was not so bad. What an immense prestige that Lingard had with all those people—Arabs, Malays and all. Ah, it was good to be able to call a man like that father. Fine! Wonder how much money really the old fellow had. People talked—they exaggerated surely, but if he had only half of what they said. . . .

He drank, throwing his head up, and fell to again. . . .

. . . Now, if that Willems had known how to play his cards well, had he stuck to the old fellow he would have been in his position, he would be now married to Lingard’s adopted daughter with his future assured—splendid . . .

“The beast!” growled Almayer, between two mouthfuls.

Ali stood rigidly straight with an uninterested face, his gaze lost in the night which pressed round the small circle of light that shone on the table, on the glass, on the bottle, and on Almayer’s head as he leaned over his plate moving his jaws.

. . . A famous man Lingard—yet you never knew what he would do next. It was notorious that he had shot a white man once for less than Willems had done. For less? . . . Why, for nothing, so to speak! It was not even his own quarrel. It was about some Malay returning from pilgrimage with wife and children. Kidnapped, or robbed, or something. A stupid story—an old story. And now he goes to see that Willems and—nothing.

Comes back talking big about his prisoner; but after all he said very little. What did that Willems tell him? What passed between them? The old fellow must have had something in his mind when he let that scoundrel off. And Joanna! She would get round the old fellow. Sure. Then he would forgive perhaps. Impossible. But at any rate he would waste a lot of money on them. The old man was tenacious in his hates, but also in his affections. He had known that beast Willems from a boy. They would make it up in a year or so. Everything is possible: why did he not rush off at first and kill the brute? That would have been more like Lingard. . . .

Almayer laid down his spoon suddenly, and pushing his plate away, threw himself back in the chair.

. . . Unsafe. Decidedly unsafe. He had no mind to share Lingard's money with anybody. Lingard's money was Nina's money in a sense. And if Willems managed to become friendly with the old man it would be dangerous for him—Almayer. Such an unscrupulous scoundrel! He would oust him from his position. He would lie and slander. Everything would be lost. Lost. Poor Nina. What would become of her? Poor child. For her sake he must remove that Willems. Must. But how? Lingard wanted to be obeyed. Impossible to kill Willems. Lingard might be angry. Incredible, but so it was. He might . . .

A wave of heat passed through Almayer's body, flushed his face, and broke out of him in copious perspiration. He wriggled in his chair, and pressed his hands together under the table. What an awful prospect! He fancied he could see Lingard and Willems reconciled and going away arm-in-arm, leaving him alone in this God-forsaken hole—in Sambir—in this deadly swamp! And all his sacrifices, the sacrifice of his independence, of his best years, his surrender to Lingard's fancies and caprices, would go for nothing! Horrible! Then he thought of his little daughter—his daughter!—and the ghastliness of his supposition overpowered him. He had a deep emotion, a sudden emotion that made him feel quite faint at the idea of that young life spoiled before it had fairly begun. His dear child's life! Lying back in his chair he covered his face with both his hands.

Ali glanced down at him and said, unconcernedly—"Master finish?"

Almayer was lost in the immensity of his commiseration for himself, for his daughter, who was—perhaps—not going to be the richest woman in the world—notwithstanding Lingard's promises. He did not understand the other's question, and muttered through his fingers in a doleful tone—

"What did you say? What? Finish what?"

"Clear up meza," explained Ali.

"Clear up!" burst out Almayer, with incomprehensible exasperation. "Devil take you and the table. Stupid! Chatterer! Chelakka! Get out!"

He leaned forward, glaring at his head man, then sank back in his seat with his arms hanging straight down on each side of the chair. And he sat motionless in a meditation so concentrated and so absorbing, with all his power of thought so deep within himself, that all expression disappeared from his face in an aspect of staring vacancy.

Ali was clearing the table. He dropped negligently the tumbler into the greasy dish, flung there the spoon and fork, then slipped in the plate with a push amongst the remnants of food. He took up the dish, tucked up the bottle under his armpit, and went off.

"My hammock!" shouted Almayer after him.

"Ada! I come soon," answered Ali from the doorway in an offended tone, looking back over his shoulder. . . . How could he clear the table and hang the hammock at the same time. Ya—wa! Those white men were all alike. Wanted everything done at once. Like children . . .

The indistinct murmur of his criticism went away, faded and died out together with the soft footfall of his bare feet in the dark passage.

For some time Almayer did not move. His thoughts were busy at work shaping a momentous resolution, and in the perfect silence of the house he believed that he could hear the noise of the operation as if the work had been done with a hammer. He certainly felt a thumping of strokes, faint, profound, and startling, somewhere low down in his breast; and he was aware of a sound of dull knocking, abrupt and rapid, in his ears. Now and then he held his breath, unconsciously, too long, and had to relieve himself by a deep expiration that whistled dully through his pursed lips. The lamp standing on the far side of the table threw a section of a lighted circle on the floor, where his outstretched legs stuck out from under the table with feet rigid and turned up like the feet of a corpse; and his set face with fixed eyes would have been also like the face of the dead, but for its vacant yet conscious aspect; the hard, the stupid, the stony aspect of one not dead, but only buried under the dust, ashes, and corruption of personal thoughts, of base fears, of selfish desires.

"I will do it!"

Not till he heard his own voice did he know that he had spoken. It startled him. He stood up. The knuckles of his hand, somewhat behind him, were resting on the edge of the table as he remained still with one foot advanced, his lips a little open, and thought:

It would not do to fool about with Lingard. But I must risk it. It's the only way I can see. I must tell her. She has some little sense. I wish they were a thousand miles off already. A hundred thousand miles. I do. And if it fails. And she blabs out then to Lingard? She seemed a fool. No; probably they will get away. And if they did, would Lingard believe me? Yes. I never lied to him. He would believe. I don't know . . . Perhaps he won't. . . . "I must do it. Must!" he argued aloud to himself.

For a long time he stood still, looking before him with an intense gaze, a gaze rapt and immobile, that seemed to watch the minute quivering of a delicate balance, coming to a rest.

To the left of him, in the whitewashed wall of the house that formed the back of the verandah, there was a closed door. Black letters were painted on it proclaiming the fact that behind that door there was the office of Lingard & Co. The interior had been furnished by Lingard when he had built the house for his adopted daughter and her husband, and it had been furnished with reckless prodigality. There was an office desk, a revolving chair, bookshelves, a safe: all to humour the weakness of Almayer, who thought all those paraphernalia necessary to successful trading. Lingard had laughed, but had taken immense trouble to get the things. It pleased him to make his *protégé*, his adopted son-in-law, happy. It had been the sensation of Sambir some five years ago. While the things were being landed, the whole settlement literally lived on the river bank in front of the Rajah Laut's house, to look, to wonder, to admire. . . . What a big meza, with many boxes fitted all over it and under it! What did the white man do with such a table? And look, look, O Brothers! There is a green square box, with a gold plate on it, a box so heavy that those twenty men cannot drag it up the bank. Let us go, brothers, and help pull at the ropes, and perchance we may see what's inside. Treasure, no doubt. Gold is heavy and hard to hold, O Brothers! Let us go and earn a recompense from the fierce Rajah of the Sea who shouts over there, with a red face. See! There is a man carrying a pile of books from the boat! What a number of books. What were they for? . . . And an old invalided jurumudi, who had travelled over many seas and had heard holy men speak in far-off countries, explained to a small knot of unsophisticated citizens of Sambir that those books were books of magic—of magic that guides the white men's ships over the seas, that gives them their wicked wisdom and their strength; of magic that make them great, powerful, and irresistible while they live, and—praise be to Allah!—the victims of Satan, the slaves of Jehannum when they die.

And when he saw the room furnished, Almayer had felt proud.

In his exultation of an empty-headed quill-driver, he thought himself, by the virtue of that furniture, at the head of a serious business. He had sold himself to Lingard for these things—married the Malay girl of his adoption for the reward of these things and of the great wealth that must necessarily follow upon conscientious book-keeping. He found out very soon that trade in Sambir meant something entirely different. He could not guide Patalolo, control the irrepressible old Sahamin, or restrain the youthful vagaries of the fierce Bahassoen with pen, ink, and paper. He found no successful magic in the blank pages of his ledgers; and gradually he lost his old point of view in the saner appreciation of his situation. The room known as the office became neglected then like a temple of an exploded superstition. At first, when his wife reverted to her original savagery, Almayer, now and again, had sought refuge from her there; but after their child began to speak, to know him, he became braver, for he found courage and consolation in his unreasoning and fierce affection for his daughter—in the impenetrable mantle of selfishness he wrapped round both their lives: round himself, and that young life that was also his.

When Lingard ordered him to receive Joanna into his house, he had a trundle bed put into the office—the only room he could spare. The big office desk was pushed on one side, and Joanna came with her little shabby trunk and with her child and took possession in her dreamy, slack, half-asleep way; took possession of the dust, dirt, and squalor, where she appeared naturally at home, where she dragged a melancholy and dull existence; an existence made up of sad remorse and frightened hope, amongst the hopeless disorder—the senseless and vain decay of all these emblems of civilized commerce. Bits of white stuff; rags yellow, pink, blue: rags limp, brilliant and soiled, trailed on the floor, lay on the desk amongst the sombre covers of books soiled, grimy, but stiff-backed, in virtue, perhaps, of their European origin. The biggest set of bookshelves was partly hidden by a petticoat, the waistband of which was caught upon the back of a slender book pulled a little out of the row so as to make an improvised clothespeg. The folding canvas bedstead stood nearly in the middle of the room, stood anyhow, parallel to no wall, as if it had been, in the process of transportation to some remote place, dropped casually there by tired bearers. And on the tumbled blankets that lay in a disordered heap on its edge, Joanna sat almost all day with her stockingless feet upon one of the bed pillows that were somehow always kicking about the floor. She sat there, vaguely tormented at times by the thought of her absent husband, but most of the time thinking tearfully of nothing at

all, looking with swimming eyes at her little son—at the big-headed, pasty-faced, and sickly Louis Willems—who rolled a glass inkstand, solid with dried ink, about the floor, and tottered after it with the portentous gravity of demeanour and absolute absorption by the business in hand that characterize the pursuits of early childhood. Through the half-open shutter a ray of sunlight, a ray merciless and crude, came into the room, beat in the early morning upon the safe in the far-off corner, then, travelling against the sun, cut at midday the big desk in two with its solid and clean-edged brilliance; with its hot brilliance in which a swarm of flies hovered in dancing flight over some dirty plate forgotten there amongst yellow papers for many a day. And towards the evening the cynical ray seemed to cling to the ragged petticoat, lingered on it with wicked enjoyment of that misery it had exposed all day; lingered on the corner of the dusty bookshelf, in a red glow intense and mocking, till it was suddenly snatched by the setting sun out of the way of the coming night. And the night entered the room. The night abrupt, impenetrable and all-filling with its flood of darkness; the night cool and merciful; the blind night that saw nothing, but could hear the fretful whimpering of the child, the creak of the bedstead, Joanna's deep sighs as she turned over, sleepless, in the confused conviction of her wickedness, thinking of that man masterful, fair-headed, and strong—a man hard perhaps, but her husband; her clever and handsome husband to whom she had acted so cruelly on the advice of bad people, of her own people; and of her poor, dear, deceived mother.

To Almayer, Joanna's presence was a constant worry, a worry unobtrusive yet intolerable; a constant, but mostly mute, warning of possible danger. In view of the absurd softness of Lingard's heart, every one in whom Lingard manifested the slightest interest was to Almayer a natural enemy. He was quite alive to that feeling, and in the intimacy of the secret intercourse with his inner self had often congratulated himself upon his own wide-awake comprehension of his position. In that way, and impelled by that motive, Almayer had hated many and various persons at various times. But he never had hated and feared anybody so much as he did hate and fear Willems. Even after Willems' treachery, which seemed to remove him beyond the pale of all human sympathy, Almayer mistrusted the situation and groaned in spirit every time he caught sight of Joanna.

He saw her very seldom in the daytime. But in the short and opal-tinted twilights, or in the azure dusk of starry evenings, he often saw, before he slept, the slender and tall figure trailing to and fro the ragged tail of its white gown over the dried mud of

the riverside in front of the house. Once or twice when he sat late on the verandah, with his feet upon the deal table on a level with the lamp, reading the seven months' old copy of the *North China Herald*, brought by Lingard, he heard the stairs creak, and, looking round the paper, he saw her frail and meagre form rise step by step and toil across the verandah, carrying with difficulty the big, fat child, whose head, lying on the mother's bony shoulder, seemed of the same size as Joanna's own. Several times she had assailed him with tearful clamour or mad entreaties: asking about her husband, wanting to know where he was, when he would be back; and ending every such outburst with despairing and incoherent self-reproaches that were absolutely incomprehensible to Almayer. On one or two occasions she had overwhelmed her host with vituperative abuse, making him responsible for her husband's absence. Those scenes, begun without any warning, ended abruptly in a sobbing flight and a bang of the door; stirred the house with a sudden, a fierce, and an evanescent disturbance; like those inexplicable whirlwinds that rise, run, and vanish without apparent cause upon the sun-scorched dead level of arid and lamentable plains.

But to-night the house was quiet, deadly quiet, while Almayer stood still, watching that delicate balance where he was weighing all his chances: Joanna's intelligence, Lingard's credulity, Willems' reckless audacity, desire to escape, readiness to seize an unexpected opportunity. He weighed, anxious and attentive, his fears and his desires against the tremendous risk of a quarrel with Lingard. . . . Yes. Lingard would be angry. Lingard might suspect him of some connivance in his prisoner's escape—but surely he would not quarrel with him—Almayer—about those people once they were gone—gone to the devil in their own way. And then he had hold of Lingard through the little girl. Good. What an annoyance! A prisoner! As if one could keep him in there. He was bound to get away some time or other. Of course. A situation like that can't last. Anybody could see that. Lingard's eccentricity passed all bounds. You may kill a man, but you mustn't torture him. It was almost criminal. It caused worry, trouble, and unpleasantness. . . . Almayer for a moment felt very angry with Lingard. He made him responsible for the anguish he suffered from, for the anguish of doubt and fear; for compelling him—the practical and innocent Almayer—to such painful efforts of mind in order to find out some issue for absurd situations created by the unreasonable sentimentality of Lingard's unpractical impulses.

"Now if the fellow were dead it would be all right," said Almayer to the verandah.

He stirred a little, and scratching his nose thoughtfully, revelled in a short flight of fancy, showing him his own image crouching in a big boat, that floated arrested—say fifty yards off—abreast of Willems' landing-place. In the bottom of the boat there was a gun. A loaded gun. One of the boatmen would shout, and Willems would answer—from the bushes. The rascal would be suspicious. Of course. Then the man would wave a piece of paper urging Willems to come to the landing-place and receive an important message. "From the Rajah Laut" the man would yell as the boat edged in-shore, and that would fetch Willems out. Wouldn't it? Rather! And Almayer saw himself jumping up at the right moment, taking aim, pulling the trigger—and Willems tumbling over, his head in the water—the swine!

He seemed to hear the report of the shot. It made him thrill from head to foot where he stood. . . . How simple! . . . Unfortunate . . . Lingard . . . He sighed, shook his head. Pity. Couldn't be done. And couldn't leave him there either! Suppose the Arabs were to get hold of him again—for instance to lead an expedition up the river! Goodness only knows what harm would come of it. . . .

The balance was at rest now and inclining to the side of immediate action. Almayer walked to the door, walked up very close to it, knocked loudly, and turned his head away, looking frightened for a moment at what he had done. After waiting for a while he put his ear against the panel and listened. Nothing. He composed his features into an agreeable expression while he stood listening and thinking to himself: I hear her. Crying. Eh? I believe she has lost the little wits she had and is crying night and day since I began to prepare her for the news of her husband's death—as Lingard told me. I wonder what she thinks. It's just like father to make me invent all these stories for nothing at all. Out of kindness. Kindness! Damn! . . . She isn't deaf, surely.

He knocked again, then said in a friendly tone, grinning benevolently at the closed door—

"It's me, Mrs. Willems. I want to speak to you. I have . . . have . . . important news. . . ."

"What is it?"

"News," repeated Almayer, distinctly. "News about your husband. Your husband! . . . Damn him!" he added, under his breath.

He heard a stumbling rush inside. Things were overturned. Joanna's agitated voice cried—

"News! What? What? I am coming out."

"No," shouted Almayer. "Put on some clothes, Mrs. Willems,

and let me in. It's . . . very confidential. You have a candle, haven't you?"

She was knocking herself about blindly amongst the furniture in that room. The candlestick was upset. Matches were struck ineffectually. The matchbox fell. He heard her drop on her knees and grope over the floor while she kept on moaning in maddened distraction.

"Oh, my God! News! Yes . . . yes. . . . Ah! where . . . where . . . candle. Oh, my God! . . . I can't find . . . Don't go away, for the love of Heaven . . ."

"I don't want to go away," said Almayer, impatiently, through the keyhole; "but look sharp. It's confi . . . it's pressing."

He stamped his foot lightly, waiting with his hand on the door-handle. He thought anxiously: The woman's a perfect idiot. Why should I go away? She will be off her head. She will never catch my meaning. She's too stupid.

She was moving now inside the room hurriedly and in silence. He waited. There was a moment of perfect stillness in there, and then she spoke in an exhausted voice, in words that were shaped out of an expiring sigh—out of a sigh light and profound, like words breathed out by a woman before going off into a dead faint—

"Come in."

He pushed the door. Ali, coming through the passage with an armful of pillows and blankets pressed to his breast high up under his chin, caught sight of his master before the door closed behind him. He was so astonished that he dropped his bundle and stood staring at the door for a long time. He heard the voice of his master talking. Talking to that Sirani woman! Who was she? He had never thought about that really. He speculated for a while hazily upon things in general. She was a Sirani woman—and ugly. He made a disdainful grimace, picked up the bedding, and went about his work, slinging the hammock between two uprights of the verandah. . . . Those things did not concern him. She was ugly, and brought here by the Rajah Laut, and his master spoke to her in the night. Very well. He, Ali, had his work to do. Sling the hammock—go round and see that the watchmen were awake—take a look at the moorings of the boats, at the padlock of the big storehouse—then go to sleep. To sleep! He shivered pleasantly. He leaned with both arms over his master's hammock and fell into a light doze.

A scream, unexpected, piercing—a scream beginning at once in the highest pitch of a woman's voice and then cut short, so short that it suggested the swift work of death—caused Ali to jump on one side away from the hammock, and the silence that

succeeded seemed to him as startling as the awful shriek. He was thunderstruck with surprise. Almayer came out of the office, leaving the door ajar, passed close to his servant without taking any notice, and made straight for the water-chatty hung on a nail in a draughty place. He took it down and came back, missing the petrified Ali by an inch. He moved with long strides, yet, notwithstanding his haste, stopped short before the door, and, throwing his head back, poured a thin stream of water down his throat. While he came and went, while he stopped to drink, while he did all this, there came steadily from the dark room the sound of feeble and persistent crying, the crying of a sleepy and frightened child. After he had drunk, Almayer went in, closing the door carefully.

Ali did not budge. That Sirani woman shrieked! He felt an immense curiosity very unusual to his stolid disposition. He could not take his eyes off the door. Was she dead in there? How interesting and funny! He stood with open mouth till he heard again the rattle of the door-handle. Master coming out. He pivoted on his heels with great rapidity and made believe to be absorbed in the contemplation of the night outside. He heard Almayer moving about behind his back. Chairs were displaced. His master sat down.

"Ali," said Almayer.

His face was gloomy and thoughtful. He looked at his head man, who had approached the table, then he pulled out his watch. It was going. Whenever Lingard was in Sambir, Almayer's watch was going. He would set it by the cabin clock, telling himself every time that he must really keep that watch going for the future. And every time, when Lingard went away, he would let it run down and would measure his weariness by sunrises and sunsets in an apathetic indifference to mere hours; to hours only; to hours that had no importance in Sambir life, in the tired stagnation of empty days; when nothing mattered to him but the quality of guttah and the size of rattans; where there were no small hopes to be watched for; where to him there was nothing interesting, nothing supportable, nothing desirable to expect; nothing bitter but the slowness of the passing days; nothing sweet but the hope, the distant and glorious hope—the hope wearying, aching and precious, of getting away.

He looked at the watch. Half-past eight. Ali waited stolidly.

"Go to the settlement," said Almayer, "and tell Mahmat Banjer to come and speak to me to-night."

Ali went off muttering. He did not like his errand. Banjer and his two brothers were Bajow vagabonds who had appeared lately in Sambir and had been allowed to take possession of a

tumbledown abandoned hut, on three posts, belonging to Lingard & Co., and standing just outside their fence. Ali disapproved of the favour shown to those strangers. Any kind of dwelling was valuable in Sambir at that time, and if master did not want that old rotten house he might have given it to him, Ali, who was his servant, instead of bestowing it upon those bad men. Everybody knew they were bad. It was well known that they had stolen a boat from Hinopari, who was very aged and feeble and had no sons; and that afterwards, by the truculent recklessness of their demeanour, they had frightened the poor old man into holding his tongue about it. Yet everybody knew of it. It was one of the tolerated scandals of Sambir, disapproved and accepted, a manifestation of that base acquiescence in success, of that inexpressed and cowardly toleration of strength, that exists, infamous and irremediable, at the bottom of all hearts, in all societies; whenever men congregate; in bigger and more virtuous places than Sambir, and in Sambir also, where, as in other places, one man could steal a boat with impunity while another would have no right to look at a paddle.

Almayer, leaning back in his chair, meditated. The more he thought, the more he felt convinced that Banjer and his brothers were exactly the men he wanted. Those fellows were sea gipsies, and could disappear without attracting notice; and if they returned, nobody—and Lingard least of all—would dream of seeking information from them. Moreover, they had no personal interest of any kind in Sambir affairs—had taken no sides—would know nothing anyway.

He called in a strong voice: "Mrs. Willems!"

She came out quickly, almost startling him, so much did she appear as though she had surged up through the floor, on the other side of the table. The lamp was between them, and Almayer moved it aside, looking up at her from his chair. She was crying. She was crying gently, silently, in a ceaseless welling up of tears that did not fall in drops, but seemed to overflow in a clear sheet from under her eyelids—seemed to flow at once all over her face, her cheeks, and over her chin that glistened with moisture in the light. Her breast and her shoulders were shaken repeatedly by a convulsive and noiseless catching in her breath, and after every spasmodic sob her sorrowful little head, tied up in a red kerchief, trembled on her long neck, round which her bony hand gathered and clasped the disarranged dress.

"Compose yourself, Mrs. Willems," said Almayer.

She emitted an inarticulate sound that seemed to be a faint, a very far off, a hardly audible cry of mortal distress. Then the tears went on flowing in profound stillness.

"You must understand that I have told you all this because I am your friend—real friend," said Almayer, after looking at her for some time with visible dissatisfaction. "You, his wife, ought to know the danger he is in. Captain Lingard is a terrible man, you know."

She blubbered out, sniffing and sobbing together.

"Do you . . . you . . . speak . . . the . . . the truth now?"

"Upon my word of honour. On the head of my child," protested Almayer. "I had to deceive you till now because of Captain Lingard. But I couldn't bear it. Think only what a risk I run in telling you—if ever Lingard was to know! Why should I do it? Pure friendship. Dear Peter was my colleague in Macassar for years, you know."

"What shall I do . . . what shall I do!" she exclaimed, faintly, looking around on every side as if she could not make up her mind which way to rush off.

"You must help him to clear out, now Lingard is away. He offended Lingard, and that's no joke. Lingard said he would kill him. He will do it, too," said Almayer, earnestly.

She wrung her hands. "Oh! the wicked man. The wicked, wicked man!" she moaned, swaying her body from side to side.

"Yes. Yes! He is terrible," assented Almayer. "You must not lose any time. I say! Do you understand me, Mrs. Willems? Think of your husband. Of your poor husband. How happy he will be. You will bring him his life—actually his life. Think of him."

She ceased her swaying movement, and now, with her head sunk between her shoulders, she hugged herself with both her arms; and she stared at Almayer with wild eyes, while her teeth chattered, rattling violently and uninterruptedly, with a very loud sound, in the deep peace of the house.

"Oh! Mother of God!" she wailed. "I am a miserable woman. Will he forgive me? The poor, innocent man. Will he forgive me? Oh, Mr. Almayer, he is so severe. Oh! help me. . . . I dare not. . . . You don't know what I've done to him. . . . I daren't! . . . I can't! . . . God help me!"

The last words came in a despairing cry. Had she been flayed alive she could not have sent to heaven a more terrible, a more heartrending and anguished plaint.

"Sh! Sh!" hissed Almayer, jumping up "You will wake up everybody with your shouting."

She kept on sobbing then without any noise, and Almayer stared at her in boundless astonishment. The idea that, maybe, he had done wrong by confiding in her, upset him so much that

for a moment he could not find a connected thought in his head.

At last he said: "I swear to you that your husband is in such a position that he would welcome the devil . . . listen well to me . . . the devil himself if the devil came to him in a canoe. Unless I am much mistaken," he added, under his breath. Then again, loudly: "If you have any little difference to make up with him, I assure you—I swear to you—this is your time!"

The ardently persuasive tone of his words—he thought—would have carried irresistible conviction to a graven image. He noticed with satisfaction that Joanna seemed to have got some inkling of his meaning. He continued, speaking slowly—

"Look here, Mrs. Willems. I can't do anything. Daren't. But I will tell you what I will do. There will come here in about ten minutes a Bugis man—you know the language; you are from Macassar. He has a large canoe; he can take you there. To the new Kajah's clearing, tell him. They are three brothers, ready for anything if you pay them . . . you have some money. Haven't you?"

She stood—perhaps listening—but giving no sign of intelligence, and stared at the floor in sudden immobility, as if the horror of the situation, the overwhelming sense of her own wickedness and of her husband's great danger, had stunned her brain, her heart, her will—had left her no faculty but that of breathing and of keeping on her feet. Almayer swore to himself with much mental profanity that he had never seen a more useless, a more stupid being.

"D'ye hear me?" he said, raising his voice. "Do try to understand. Have you any money? Money. Dollars. Guilders. Money! What's the matter with you?"

Without raising her eyes she said, in a voice that sounded weak and undecided as if she had been making a desperate effort of memory—

"The house has been sold. Mr. Hudig was angry."

Almayer gripped the edge of the table with all his strength. He resisted manfully an almost uncontrollable impulse to fly at her and box her ears.

"It was sold for money, I suppose," he said with studied and incisive calmness. "Have you got it? Who has got it?"

She looked up at him, raising her swollen eyelids with a great effort, in a sorrowful expression of her drooping mouth, of her whole besmudged and tear-stained face. She whispered resignedly—

"Leonard had some. He wanted to get married. And uncle Antonio; he sat at the door and would not go away. And Aghostina—she is so poor . . . and so many, many children—

little children. And Luiz the engineer. He never said a word against my husband. Also our cousin Maria. She came and shouted, and my head was so bad, and my heart was worse. Then cousin Salvator and old Daniel da Souza, who . . .”

Almayer had listened to her speechless with rage. He thought: I must give money now to that idiot. Must! Must get her out of the way now before Lingard is back. He made two attempts to speak before he managed to burst out—

“I don’t want to know their blasted names! Tell me, did all those infernal people leave you anything? To you! That’s what I want to know!”

“I have two hundred and fifteen dollars,” said Joanna, in a frightened tone.

Almayer breathed freely. He spoke with great friendliness—

“That will do. It isn’t much, but it will do. Now when the man comes I will be out of the way. You speak to him. Give him some money; only a little, mind! And promise more. Then when you get there you will be guided by your husband, of course. And don’t forget to tell him that Captain Lingard is at the mouth of the river—the northern entrance. You will remember. Won’t you? The northern branch. Lingard is—death.”

Joanna shivered. Almayer went on rapidly—

“I would have given you money if you had wanted it. ’Pon my word! Tell your husband I’ve sent you to him. And tell him not to lose any time. And also say to him from me that we shall meet—some day. That I could not die happy unless I met him once more. Only once. I love him, you know. I prove it. Tremendous risk to me—this business is!”

Joanna snatched his hand and before he knew what she would be at, pressed it to her lips.

“Mrs. Willems! Don’t. What are you . . .” cried the abashed Almayer, tearing his hand away.

“Oh, you are good!” she cried, with sudden exaltation. “You are noble . . . I shall pray every day . . . to all the saints . . . I shall . . .”

“Never mind . . . never mind!” stammered out Almayer, confusedly, without knowing very well what he was saying. “Only look out for Lingard. . . . I am happy to be able . . . in your sad situation . . . believe me. . . .”

They stood with the table between them, Joanna looking down, and her face, in the half-light above the lamp, appeared like a soiled carving of old ivory—a carving, with accentuated anxious hollows, of old, very old ivory. Almayer looked at her, mistrustful, hopeful. He was saying to himself: How frail she is! I could upset her by blowing at her. She seems to have got some idea of

what must be done, but will she have the strength to carry it through? I must trust to luck now!

Somewhere far in the back courtyard Ali's voice rang suddenly in angry remonstrance—

"Why did you shut the gate, O father of all mischief? You a watchman! You are only a wild man. Did I not tell you I was coming back? You . . ."

"I am off, Mrs. Willems," exclaimed Almayer. "That man is here—with my servant. Be calm. Try to . . ."

He heard the footsteps of the two men in the passage, and without finishing his sentence ran rapidly down the steps towards the riverside.

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FOR the next half-hour Almayer, who wanted to give Joanna plenty of time, stumbled amongst the lumber in distant parts of his enclosure, sneaked along the fences, or held his breath, flattened against grass walls behind various outhouses: all this to escape Ali's inconveniently zealous search for his master. He heard him talk with the head watchman—sometimes quite close to him in the darkness—then moving off, coming back, wondering, and, as the time passed, growing uneasy.

"He did not fall into the river?—say, thou blind watcher!" Ali was growling in a bullying tone, to the other man. "He told me to fetch Mahmat, and when I came back swiftly I found him not in the house. There is that Sirani woman there, so that Mahmat cannot steal anything, but it is in my mind, the night will be half gone before I rest."

He shouted—

"Master! O master! O mast . . ."

"What are you making that noise for?" said Almayer, with severity, stepping out close to them.

The two Malays leaped away from each other in their surprise.

"You may go. I don't want you any more to night, Ali," went on Almayer. "Is Mahmat there?"

"Unless the ill-behaved savage got tired of waiting. Those men know not politeness. They should not be spoken to by white men," said Ali, resentfully.

Almayer went towards the house, leaving his servants to wonder where he had sprung from so unexpectedly. The watchman hinted obscurely at powers of invisibility possessed by the master, who often at night . . . Ali interrupted him with great scorn. Not every white man has the power. Now, the Rajah Laut could

make himself invisible. Also, he could be in two places at once, as everybody knew; except he—the useless watchman—who knew no more about white men than a wild pig! Ya-wa!

And Ali strolled towards his hut, yawning loudly.

As Almayer ascended the steps he heard the noise of a door flung to, and when he entered the verandah he saw only Mahmat there, close to the doorway of the passage. Mahmat seemed to be caught in the very act of slinking away, and Almayer noticed that with satisfaction. Seeing the white man, the Malay gave up his attempt and leaned against the wall. He was a short, thick, broad-shouldered man with very dark skin and a wide, stained, bright-red mouth that uncovered, when he spoke, a close row of black and glistening teeth. His eyes were big, prominent, dreamy and restless. He said sulkily, looking all over the place from under his eyebrows—

“White Tuan, you are great and strong—and I a poor man. Tell me what is your will, and let me go in the name of God. It is late.”

Almayer examined the man thoughtfully. How could he find out whether . . . He had it! Lately he had employed that man and his two brothers as extra boatmen to carry stores, provisions, and new axes to a camp of rattan cutters some distance up the river. A three days' expedition. He would test him now in that way. He said negligently—

“I want you to start at once for the camp, with a surat for the Kavitan. One dollar a day.” *

The man appeared plunged in dull hesitation, but Almayer, who knew his Malays, felt pretty sure from his aspect that nothing would induce the fellow to go. He urged—

“It is important—and if you are swift I shall give two dollars for the last day.”

“No, Tuan. We do not go,” said the man, in a hoarse whisper.

“Why?”

“We start on another journey.”

“Where?”

“To a place we know of,” said Mahmat, a little louder, in a stubborn manner, and looking at the floor.

Almayer experienced a feeling of immense joy. He said, with affected annoyance—

“You men live in my house—and it is as if it were your own. I may want my house soon.”

Mahmat looked up.

“We are men of the sea and care not for a roof when we have a canoe that will hold three, and a paddle apiece. The sea is our house. Peace be with you, Tuan.”

He turned and went away rapidly, and Almayer heard him directly afterwards in the courtyard calling to the watchman to open the gate. Mahmat passed through the gate in silence, but before the bar had been put up behind him he had made up his mind that if the white man ever wanted to eject him from his hut, he would burn it and also as many of the white man's other buildings as he could safely get at. And he began to call his brothers before he was inside the dilapidated dwelling.

"All's well!" muttered Almayer to himself, taking some loose Java tobacco from a drawer in the table. "Now if anything comes out I am clear. I asked the man to go up the river. I urged him. He will say so himself. Good."

He began to charge the china bowl of his pipe, a pipe with a long cherry stem and a curved mouthpiece, pressing the tobacco down with his thumb and thinking: No. I sha'n't see her again. Don't want to. I will give her a good start, then go in chase—and send an express boat after father. Yes! that's it.

He approached the door of the office and said, holding his pipe away from his lips—

"Good luck to you, Mrs. Willems. Don't lose any time. You may get along by the bushes; the fence there is out of repair. Don't lose time. Don't forget that it is a matter of . . . life and death. And don't forget that I know nothing. I trust you."

He heard inside a noise as of a chest-lid falling down. She made a few steps. Then a sigh, profound and long, and some faint words which he did not catch. He moved away from the door on tiptoe, kicked off his slippers in a corner of the verandah, then entered the passage puffing at his pipe; entered cautiously in a gentle creaking of planks and turned into a curtained entrance to the left. There was a big room. On the floor a small binnacle lamp—that had found its way to the house years ago from the lumber-room of the *Flash*—did duty for a night-light. It glimmered very small and dull in the great darkness. Almayer walked to it, and picking it up revived the flame by pulling the wick with his fingers, which he shook directly after with a grimace of pain. Sleeping shapes, covered—head and all—with white sheets, lay about the mats of the floor. In the middle of the room a small cot, under a square white mosquito net, stood—the only piece of furniture between the four walls—looking like an altar of transparent marble in a gloomy temple. A woman, half-lying on the floor with her head dropped on her arms, which were crossed on the foot of the cot, woke up as Almayer strode over her outstretched legs. She sat up without a word, leaning forward, and, clasping her knees, stared down with sad eyes, full of sleep.

Almayer, the smoky light in one hand, his pipe in the other,

stood before the curtained cot looking at his daughter—at his little Nina—at that part of himself, at that small and unconscious particle of humanity that seemed to him to contain all his soul. And it was as if he had been bathed in a bright and warm wave of tenderness, in a tenderness greater than the world, more precious than life; the only thing real, living, sweet, tangible, beautiful and safe amongst the elusive, the distorted and menacing shadows of existence. On his face, lit up indistinctly by the short yellow flame of the lamp, came a look of rapt attention while he looked into her future. And he could see things there! Things charming and splendid passing before him in a magic unrolling of resplendent pictures; pictures of events brilliant, happy, inexpressibly glorious, that would make up her life. He would do it! He would do it. He would! He would—for that child! And as he stood in the still night, lost in his enchanting and gorgeous dreams, while the ascending, thin thread of tobacco smoke spread into a faint bluish cloud above his head, he appeared strangely impressive and ecstatic: like a devout and mystic worshipper, adoring, transported and mute; burning incense before a shrine, a diaphanous shrine of a child-idol with closed eyes; before a pure and vaporous shrine of a small god—fragile, powerless, unconscious and sleeping.

When Ali, roused by loud and repeated shouting of his name, stumbled outside the door of his hut, he saw a narrow streak of trembling gold above the forests and a pale sky with faded stars overhead: signs of the coming day. His master stood before the door waving a piece of paper in his hand and shouting excitedly—"Quick, Ali! Quick!" When he saw his servant he rushed forward, and pressing the paper on him objurgated him, in tones which inducted Ali to think that something awful had happened, to hurry up and get the whale-boat ready to go immediately—at once, at once—after Captain Lingard. Ali remonstrated, agitated also, having caught the infection of distracted haste.

"If must go quick, better canoe. Whale-boat no can catch, same as small canoe."

"No, no! Whale-boat! whale-boat! You dolt! you wretch!" howled Almayer, with all the appearance of having gone mad. "Call the men! Get along with it. Fly!"

And Ali rushed about the courtyard kicking the doors of huts open to put his head in and yell frightfully inside; and as he dashed from hovel to hovel, men shivering and sleepy were coming out, looking after him stupidly, while they scratched their ribs with bewildered apathy. It was hard work to put them in motion. They wanted time to stretch themselves and to shiver a little. Some wanted food. One said he was sick. Nobody knew where

the rudder was. Ali darted here and there, ordering, abusing, pushing one, then another, and stopping in his exertions at times to wring his hands hastily and groan, because the whale-boat was much slower than the worst canoe and his master would not listen to his protestations.

Almayer saw the boat go off at last, pulled anyhow by men that were cold, hungry, and sulky; and he remained on the jetty watching it down the reach. It was broad day then, and the sky was perfectly cloudless. Almayer went up to the house for a moment. His household was all astir and wondering at the strange disappearance of the Sirani woman, who had taken her child and left her luggage. Almayer spoke to no one, got his revolver, and went down to the river again. He jumped into a small canoe and paddled himself towards the schooner. He worked very leisurely, but as soon as he was nearly alongside he began to hail the silent craft with the tone and appearance of a man in a tremendous hurry.

"Schooner ahoy! schooner ahoy!" he shouted.

A row of blank faces popped up above the bulwark. After a while a man with a woolly head of hair said—

"Sir!"

"The mate! the mate! Call him, steward!" said Almayer, excitedly, making a frantic grab at a rope thrown down to him by somebody. In less than a minute the mate put his head over. He asked, surprised—

"What can I do for you, Mr. Almayer?"

"Let me have the gig at once, Mr. Swan—at once. I ask in Captain Lingard's name. I must have it. Matter of life and death."

The mate was impressed by Almayer's agitation.

"You shall have it, sir. . . . Man the gig there! Bear a hand, serang! . . . It's hanging astern, Mr. Almayer," he said, looking down again. "Get into it, sir. The men are coming down by the painter."

By the time Almayer had clambered over into the stern sheets, four calashes were in the boat and the oars were being passed over the taffrail. The mate was looking on. Suddenly he said—

"Is it dangerous work? Do you want any help? I would come . . ."

"Yes, yes!" cried Almayer. "Come along. Don't lose a moment. Go and get your revolver. Hurry up! hurry up!"

Yet, notwithstanding his feverish anxiety to be off, he lolled back very quiet and unconcerned till the mate got in and, passing over the thwarts, sat down by his side. Then he seemed to wake up, and called out—

"Let go—let go the painter!"

"Let go the painter—the painter!" yelled the bowman, jerking at it.

People on board also shouted "Let go!" to one another, till it occurred at last to somebody to cast off the rope; and the boat drifted rapidly away from the schooner in the sudden silencing of all voices.

Almayer steered. The mate sat by his side, pushing the cartridges into the chambers of his revolver. When the weapon was loaded he asked—

"What is it? Are you after somebody?"

"Yes," said Almayer, curtly, with his eyes fixed ahead on the river. "We must catch a dangerous man."

"I like a bit of a chase myself," declared the mate, and then, discouraged by Almayer's aspect of severe thoughtfulness, said nothing more.

Nearly an hour passed. The calashes stretched forward head first and lay back with their faces to the sky, alternately, in a regular swing that sent the boat flying through the water; and the two sitters, very upright in the stern sheets, swayed rhythmically a little at every stroke of the long oars plied vigorously.

The mate observed: "The tide is with us."

"The current always runs down in this river," said Almayer.

"Yes—I know," retorted the other; "but it runs faster on the ebb. Look by the land at the way we get over the ground! A five-knot current here, I should say."

"H'm!" growled Almayer. Then suddenly: "There is a passage between two islands that will save us four miles. But at low water the two islands, in the dry season, are like one with only a mud ditch between them. Still, it's worth trying."

"Ticklish job that, on a falling tide," said the mate coolly. "You know best whether there's time to get through."

"I will try," said Almayer, watching the shore intently. "Look out now."

He tugged hard at the starboard yoke-line.

"Lay in your oars!" shouted the mate.

The boat swept round and shot through the narrow opening of a creek that broadened out before the craft had time to lose its way.

"Out oars! . . . Just room enough," muttered the mate.

It was a sombre creek of black water speckled with the gold of scattered sunlight falling through the boughs that met overhead in a soaring, restless arc full of gentle whispers passing, tremulous, aloft amongst the thick leaves. The creepers climbed up the trunks of serried trees that leaned over, looking insecure and under-

mined by floods which had eaten away the earth from under their roots. And the pungent, acrid smell of rotting leaves, of flowers, of blossoms and plants dying in that poisonous and cruel gloom, where they pined for sunshine in vain, seemed to lay heavy, to press upon the shiny and stagnant water in its tortuous windings amongst the everlasting and invincible shadows.

Almayer looked anxious. He steered badly. Several times the blades of the oars got foul of the bushes on one side or the other, checking the way of the gig. During one of those occurrences, while they were getting clear, one of the calashes said something to the others in a rapid whisper. They looked down at the water. So did the mate.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Eh, Mr. Almayer! Look! The water is running out. See there! We will be caught."

"Back! back! We must go back!" cried Almayer.

"Perhaps better go on."

"No; back! back!"

He pulled at the steering line, and ran the nose of the boat into the bank. Time was lost again in getting clear.

"Give way, men! give way!" urged the mate, anxiously.

The men pulled with set lips and dilated nostrils, breathing hard.

"Too late," said the mate, suddenly. "The oars touch the bottom already. We are done."

The boat stuck. The men laid in the oars, and sat, panting, with crossed arms.

"Yes, we are caught," said Almayer, composedly. "That is unlucky!"

The water was falling round the boat. The mate watched the patches of mud coming to the surface. Then in a moment he laughed pointing his finger at the creek—

"Look!" he said; "the blamed river is running away from us. Here's the last drop of water clearing out round that bend."

Almayer lifted his head. The water was gone, and he looked only at a curved track of mud—of mud soft and black, hiding fever, rottenness, and evil under its level and glazed surface.

"We are in for it till the evening," he said, with cheerful resignation. "I did my best. Couldn't help it."

"We must sleep the day away," said the mate. "There's nothing to eat," he added, gloomily.

Almayer stretched himself in the stern sheets. The Malays curled down between thwarts.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said the mate, starting up after a long pause. "I was in a devil of a hurry to go and pass the day stuck in the mud. Here's a holiday for you! Well! well!"

They slept or sat unmoving and patient. As the sun mounted higher the breeze died out, and perfect stillness reigned in the empty creek. A troop of long-nosed monkeys appeared, and crowding on the outer boughs, contemplated the boat and the motionless men in it with grave and sorrowful intensity, disturbed now and then by irrational outbreaks of mad gesticulation. A little bird with sapphire breast balanced a slender twig across a slanting beam of light, and flashed in it to and fro like a dropped from the sky. His minute round eye stared at the strange and tranquil creatures in the boat. After a while he sent out a thin twitter that sounded impertinent and funny in the solemn silence of the great wilderness; in the great silence full of struggle and death.

25

ON LINGARD'S departure solitude and silence closed round Willems; the cruel solitude of one abandoned by men; the reproachful silence which surrounds an outcast ejected by his kind, the silence unbroken by the slightest whisper of hope; an immense and impenetrable silence that swallows up without echo the murmur of regret and the cry of revolt. The bitter peace of the abandoned clearings entered his heart, in which nothing could live now but the memory and hate of his past. Not remorse. In the breast of a man possessed by the masterful consciousness of his individuality with its desires and its rights; by the immovable conviction of his own importance, of an importance so indisputable and final that it clothes all his wishes, endeavours, and mistakes with the dignity of unavoidable fate, there could be no place for such a feeling as that of remorse.

The days passed. They passed unnoticed, unseen, in the rapid blaze of glaring sunrises, in the short glow of tender sunsets, in the crushing oppression of high noons without a cloud. How many days? Two—three—or more? He did not know. To him, since Lingard had gone, the time seemed to roll on in profound darkness. All was night within him. All was gone from his sight. He walked about blindly in the deserted courtyards, amongst the empty houses that, perched high on their posts, looked down inimically on him, a white stranger, a man from other lands; seemed to look hostile and mute out of all the memories of native life that lingered between their decaying walls. His wandering feet stumbled against the blackened brands of extinct fires, kicking up a light black dust of cold ashes that flew in drifting

clouds and settled to leeward on the fresh grass sprouting from the hard ground, between the shady trees. He moved on, and on; ceaseless, unresting, in widening circles, in zigzagging paths that led to no issue; he struggled on wearily with a set, distressed face behind which, in his tired brain, seethed his thoughts: restless, sombre, tangled, chilling, horrible and venomous, like a nestful of snakes.

From afar, the bleared eyes of the old serving woman, the sombre gaze of Aissa followed the gaunt and tottering figure in its unceasing prow along the fences, between the houses, amongst the wild luxuriance of riverside thickets. Those three human beings abandoned by all were like shipwrecked people left on an insecure and slippery ledge by the retiring tide of an angry sea—listening to its distant roar, living anguished between the menace of its return and the hopeless horror of their solitude—in the midst of a tempest of passion, of regret, of disgust, of despair. The breath of the storm had cast two of them there, robbed of everything—even of resignation. The third, the decrepit witness of their struggle and their torture, accepted her own dull conception of facts; of strength and youth gone; of her useless old age; of her last servitude; of being thrown away by her chief, by her nearest, to use up the last and worthless remnant of flickering life between those two incomprehensible and sombre outcasts: a shrivelled, an unmoved, a passive companion of their disaster.

To the river Willems turned his eyes like a captive that looks fixedly at the door of his cell. If there was any hope in the world it would come from the river, by the river. For hours together he would stand in sunlight while the sea breeze sweeping over the lonely reach fluttered his ragged garments; the keen salt breeze that made him shiver now and then under the flood of intense heat. He looked at the brown and sparkling solitude of the flowing water, of the water flowing ceaseless and free in a soft, cool murmur of ripples at his feet. The world seemed to end there. The forests of the other bank appeared unattainable, enigmatical, for ever beyond reach like the stars of heaven—and as indifferent. Above and below, the forests on his side of the river came down to the water in a serried multitude of tall, immense trees towering in a great spread of twisted boughs above the thick undergrowth; great, solid trees, looking sombre, severe, and malevolently stolid, like a giant crowd of pitiless enemies pressing round silently to witness his slow agony. He was alone, small, crushed. He thought of escape—of something to be done. What? A raft! He imagined himself working at it, feverishly, desperately; cutting down trees, fastening the logs together and then drifting down with the current, down to the sea into the straits. There were ships there

—ships, help, white men. Men like himself. Good men who would rescue him, take him away, take him far away where there was trade, and houses, and other men that could understand him exactly, appreciate his capabilities; where there was proper food, and money; where there were beds, knives, forks, carriages, brass bands, cool drinks, churches with well-dressed people praying in them. He would pray also. The superior land of refined delights where he could sit on a chair, eat his tiffin off a white tablecloth, nod to fellows—good fellows; he would be popular; always was—where he could be virtuous, correct, do business, draw a salary, smoke cigars, buy things in shops—have boots . . . be happy, free, become rich. O God! What was wanted? Cut down a few trees. No! One would do. They used to make canoes by burning out a tree trunk, he had heard. Yes! One would do. One tree to cut down . . . He rushed forward, and suddenly stood still as if rooted in the ground. He had a pocket-knife.

And he would throw himself down on the ground by the river-side. He was tired, exhausted; as if that raft had been made, the voyage accomplished, the fortune attained. A glaze came over his staring eyes, over his eyes that gazed hopelessly at the rising river where big logs and uprooted trees drifted in the shine of mid-stream: a long procession of black and ragged specks. He could swim out and drift away on one of these trees. Anything to escape! Anything! Any risk! He could fasten himself up between the dead branches. He was torn by desire, by fear; his heart was wrung by the faltering of his courage. He turned over face downwards, his head on his arms. He had a terrible vision of shadowless horizons where the blue sky and the blue sea met; or a circular and blazing emptiness where a dead tree and a dead man drifted together, endlessly, up and down, upon the brilliant undulations of the straits. No ships there. Only death. And the river led to it.

He sat up with a profound groan.

Yes, death. Why should he die? No! Better solitude, better hopeless waiting, alone. Alone. No! he was not alone, he saw death looking at him from everywhere; from the bushes, from the clouds—he heard her speaking to him in the murmur of the river, filling the space, touching his heart, his brain with a cold hand. He could see and think of nothing else. He saw it—the sure death—everywhere. He saw it so close that he was always on the point of throwing out his arms to keep it off. It poisoned all he saw, all he did; the miserable food he ate, the muddy water he drank; it gave a frightful aspect to sunrises and sunsets, to the brightness of hot noon, to the cooling shadows of the evenings. He saw the horrible form among the big trees, in

the network of creepers in the fantastic outlines of leaves, of the great indented leaves that seemed to be so many enormous hands with big broad palms, with stiff fingers outspread to lay hold of him; hands gently stirring, or hands arrested in a frightful immobility, with a stillness attentive and watching for the opportunity to take him, to enlace him, to strangle him, to hold him till he died; hands that would hold him dead, that would never let go, that would cling to his body for ever till it perished—disappeared in their frantic and tenacious grasp.

And yet the world was full of life. All the things, all the men he knew, existed, moved, breathed; and he saw them in a long perspective, far off, diminished, distinct, desirable, unattainable, precious . . . lost for ever. Round him, ceaselessly, there went on without a sound the mad turmoil of tropical life. After he had died all this would remain! He wanted to clasp, to embrace solid things; he had an immense craving for sensations; for touching, pressing, seeing, handling, holding on, to all these things. All this would remain—remain for years, for ages, for ever. After he had miserably died there, all this would remain, would live, would exist in joyous sunlight, would breathe in the coolness of serene nights. What for, then? He would be dead. He would be stretched upon the warm moisture of the ground, feeling nothing, seeing nothing, knowing nothing; he would lie stiff, passive, rotting slowly; while over him, under him, through him—unopposed, busy, hurried—the endless and minute throngs of insects, little shining monsters of repulsive shapes, with horns, with claws, with pincers, would swarm in streams, in rushes, in eager struggle for his body; would swarm countless, persistent, ferocious and greedy—till there would remain nothing but the white gleam of bleaching bones in the long grass; in the long grass that would shoot its feathery heads between the bare and polished ribs. There would be that only left of him; nobody would miss him; no one would remember him.

Nonsense! It could not be. There were ways out of this. Somebody would turn up. Some human beings would come. He would speak, entreat—use force to extort help from them. He felt strong; he was very strong. He would . . . The discouragement, the conviction of the futility of his hopes would return in an acute sensation of pain in his heart. He would begin again his aimless wanderings. He tramped till he was ready to drop, without being able to calm by bodily fatigue the trouble of his soul. There was no rest, no peace within the cleared grounds of his prison. There was no relief but in the black release of sleep, of sleep without memory and without dreams; in the sleep coming brutal and heavy, like the lead that kills. To forget in annihilat-

ing sleep; to tumble headlong, as if stunned, out of daylight into night of oblivion, was for him the only, the rare respite from this existence which he lacked the courage to endure—or to end.

He lived, he struggled with the inarticulate delirium of his thoughts under the eyes of the silent Aissa. She shared his torment in the poignant wonder, in the acute longing, in the despairing inability to understand the cause of his anger and of his repulsion; the hate of his looks; the mystery of his silence; the menace of his rare words—of those words in the speech of white people that were thrown at her with rage, with contempt, with the evident desire to hurt her; to hurt her who had given herself, her life—all she had to give—to that white man; to hurt her who had wanted to show him the way to true greatness, who had tried to help him, in her woman's dream of everlasting, enduring, unchangeable affection. From the short contact with the whites in the crashing collapse of her old life, there remained with her the imposing idea of irresistible power and of ruthless strength. She had found a man of their race—and with all their qualities. All whites are alike. But this man's heart was full of anger against his own people, full of anger existing there by the side of his desire of her. And to her it had been an intoxication of hope for great things born in the proud and tender consciousness of her influence. She had heard the passing whisper of wonder and fear in the presence of his hesitation, of his resistance, of his compromises; and yet with a woman's belief in the durable steadfastness of hearts, in the irresistible charm of her own personality, she had pushed him forward, trusting the future, blindly, hopefully; sure to attain by his side the ardent desire of her life, if she could only push him far beyond the possibility of retreat. She did not know, and could not conceive, anything of his—so exalted—ideals. She thought the man a warrior and a chief, ready for battle, violence, and treachery to his own people—for her. What more natural? Was he not a great, strong man? Those two, surrounded each by the impenetrable wall of their aspirations, were hopelessly alone, out of sight, out of earshot of each other; each the centre of dissimilar and distant horizons; standing each on a different earth, under a different sky. She remembered his words, his eyes, his trembling lips, his outstretched hands; she remembered the great, the immeasurable sweetness of her surrender, that beginning of her power which was to last until death. He remembered the quayside and the warehouses; the excitement of a life in a whirl of silver coins; the glorious uncertainty of a money hunt; his numerous successes, the lost possibilities of wealth and consequent glory. She, a woman, was the victim of her heart, of her woman's belief that there is nothing

in the world but love—the everlasting thing. He was the victim of his strange principles, of his continence, of his blind belief in himself, of his solemn veneration for the voice of his boundless ignorance.

In a moment of his idleness, of suspense, of discouragement, she had come—that creature—and by the touch of her hand had destroyed his future, his dignity of a clever and civilized man; had awakened in his breast the infamous thing which had driven him to what he had done, and to end miserably in the wilderness and be forgotten, or else remembered with hate or contempt. He dared not look at her, because now whenever he looked at her his thought seemed to touch crime, like an outstretched hand. She could only look at him—and at nothing else. What else was there? She followed him with a timorous gaze, with a gaze for ever expecting, patient, and entreating. And in her eyes there was the wonder and desolation of an animal that knows only suffering, of the incomplete soul that knows pain but knows not hope; that can find no refuge from the facts of life in the illusory conviction of its dignity, of an exalted destiny beyond; in the heavenly consolation of a belief in the momentous origin of its hate.

For the first three days after Lingard went away he would not even speak to her. She preferred his silence to the sound of hated and incomprehensible words he had been lately addressing to her with a wild violence of manner, passing at once into complete apathy. And during these three days he hardly ever left the river, as if on that muddy bank he had felt himself nearer to his freedom. He would stay late; he would stay till sunset; he would look at the glow of gold passing away amongst sombre clouds in a bright red flush, like a splash of warm blood. It seemed to him ominous and ghastly with a foreboding of violent death that beckoned him from everywhere—even from the sky.

One evening he remained by the riverside long after sunset, regardless of the night mist that had closed round him, had wrapped him up and clung to him like a wet winding-sheet. A slight shiver recalled him to his senses, and he walked up the courtyard towards his house. Aïssa rose from before the fire, that glimmered red through its own smoke, which hung thickening under the boughs of the big tree. She approached him from the side as he neared the plankway of the house. He saw her stop to let him begin his ascent. In the darkness her figure was like the shadow of a woman with clasped hands put out beseechingly. He stopped—could not help glancing at her. In all the sombre, gracefulness of the straight figure, her limbs, features—all was indistinct and vague but the gleam of her eyes in the faint star-

light. He turned his head away and moved on. He could feel her footsteps behind him on the bending planks, but he walked up without turning his head. He knew what she wanted. She wanted to come in there. He shuddered at the thought of what might happen in the impenetrable darkness of that house if they were to find themselves alone—even for a moment. He stopped in the doorway, and heard her say—

“Let me come in. Why this anger? Why this silence? . . . Let me watch . . . by your side. . . . Have I not watched faithfully? Did harm ever come to you when you closed your eyes while I was by? . . . I have waited . . . I have waited for your smile, for your words . . . I can wait no more. . . . Look at me . . . speak to me. Is there a bad spirit in you? A bad spirit that has eaten up your courage and your love? Let me touch you. Forget all . . . All. Forget the wicked hearts, the angry faces . . . and remember only the day I came to you . . . to you! O my heart! O my life!”

The pleading sadness of her appeal filled the space with the tremor of her low tones, that carried tenderness and tears into the great peace of the sleeping world. All around them the forests, the clearings, the river, covered by the silent veil of night, seemed to wake up and listen to her words in attentive stillness. After the sound of her voice had died out in a stifled sigh they appeared to listen yet; and nothing stirred among the shapeless shadows but the innumerable fireflies that twinkled in changing clusters, in gliding pairs, in wandering and solitary points—like the glimmering drift of scattered star-dust.

Willems turned round slowly, reluctantly, as if compelled by main force. Her face was hidden in her hands, and he looked above her bent head, into the sombre brilliance of the night. It was one of those nights, that give the impression of extreme vastness, when the sky seems higher, when the passing puffs of tepid breeze seem to bring with them faint whispers from beyond the stars. The air was full of sweet scent, of the scent charming, penetrating, and violent like the impulse of love. He looked into that great dark place odorous with the breath of life, with the mystery of existence, renewed, fecund, indestructible; and he felt afraid of his solitude, of the solitude of his body, of the loneliness of his soul in the presence of this unconscious and ardent struggle, of this lofty indifference, of this merciless and mysterious purpose, perpetuating strife and death through the march of ages. For the second time in his life he felt, in a sudden sense of his significance, the need to send a cry for help into the wilderness, and for the second time he realized the hopelessness of its unconcern. He could shout for help on every side—and nobody

would answer. He could stretch out his hands, he could call for aid, for support, for sympathy, for relief—and nobody would come. Nobody. There was no one there—but that woman.

His heart was moved, softened with pity at his own abandonment. His anger against her, against her who was the cause of all his misfortunes, vanished before his extreme need for some kind of consolation. Perhaps—if he must resign himself to his fate—she might help him to forget. To forget! For a moment, in an access of despair, so profound that it seemed like the beginning of peace, he planned the deliberate descent from his pedestal, the throwing away of his superiority, of all his hopes, of old ambitions, of the ungrateful civilization. For a moment, forgetfulness in her arms seemed possible; and lured by that possibility the semblance of renewed desire possessed his breast in a burst of reckless contempt for everything outside himself—in a savage disdain of Earth and of Heaven. He said to himself that he would not repent. The punishment for his only sin was too heavy. There was no mercy under Heaven. He did not want any. He thought, desperately, that if he could find with her again the madness of the past, the strange delirium that had changed him, that had worked his undoing, he would be ready to pay for it with an eternity of perdition. He was intoxicated by the subtle perfumes of the night; he was carried away by the suggestive stir of the warm breeze; he was possessed by the exaltation of the solitude, of the silence, of his memories, in the presence of that figure offering herself in a submissive and patient devotion; coming to him in the name of the past, in the name of those days when he could see nothing, think of nothing, desire nothing—but her embrace.

He took her suddenly in his arms, and she clasped her hands round his neck with a low cry of joy and surprise. He took her in his arms and waited for the transport, for the madness, for the sensations remembered and lost; and while she sobbed gently on his breast he held her and felt cold, sick, tired, exasperated with his failure—and ended by cursing himself. She clung to him trembling with the intensity of her happiness and her love. He heard her whispering—her face hidden on his shoulder—of past sorrow, of coming joy that would last for ever; of her unshaken belief in his love. She had always believed. Always! Even while his face was turned away from her in the dark days while his mind was wandering in his own land, amongst his own people. But it would never wander away from her any more, now it had come back. He would forget the cold faces and the hard hearts of the cruel people. What was there to remember? Nothing? Was it not so? . . .

He listened hopelessly to the faint murmur. He stood still and rigid, pressing her mechanically to his breast while he thought that there was nothing for him in the world. He was robbed of everything; robbed of his passion, of his liberty, of forgetfulness, of consolation. She, wild with delight, whispered on rapidly, of love, of light, of peace, of long years. . . . He looked drearily above her head down into the deeper gloom of the courtyard. And, all at once, it seemed to him that he was peering into a sombre hollow, into a deep black hole full of decay and of whitened bones; into an immense and inevitable grave full of corruption where sooner or later he must, unavoidably, fall.

In the morning he came out early, and stood for a time in the doorway, listening to the light breathing behind him—in the house. She slept. He had not closed his eyes through all that night. He stood swaying—then leaned against the lintel of the door. He was exhausted, done up; fancied himself hardly alive. He had a disgusted horror of himself that, as he looked at the level sea of mist at his feet, faded quickly into dull indifference. It was like a sudden and final decrepitude of his senses, of his body, of his thoughts. Standing on the high platform, he looked over the expanse of low night fog above which, here and there, stood out the feathery heads of tall bamboo clumps and the round tops of single trees, resembling small islets emerging black and solid from a ghostly and impalpable sea. Upon the faintly luminous background of the eastern sky, the sombre line of the great forests bounded that smooth sea of white vapours with an appearance of a fantastic and unattainable shore. He looked without seeing anything—thinking of himself. Before his eyes the light of the rising sun burst above the forest with the suddenness of an explosion. He saw nothing. Then, after a time, he murmured with conviction—speaking half aloud to himself in the shock of the penetrating thought:

“I am a lost man.”

He shook his hand above his head in a gesture careless and tragic, then walked down into the mist that closed above him in shining undulations under the first breath of the morning breeze.

26

WILLEMS moved languidly towards the river, then retraced his steps to the tree and let himself fall on the seat under its shade. On the other side of the immense trunk he could hear the old woman moving about, sighing loudly, muttering to herself,

snapping dry sticks, blowing up the fire. After a while a whiff of smoke drifted round to where he sat. It made him feel hungry, and that feeling was like a new indignity added to an intolerable load of humiliations. He felt inclined to cry. He felt very weak. He held up his arm before his eyes and watched for a little while the trembling of the lean limb. Skin and bone, by God! How thin he was! . . . He had suffered from fever a good deal, and he thought with tearful dismay that Lingard, although he had sent him food—and what food, great Lord: a little rice and dried fish; quite unfit for a white man—had not sent him any medicine. Did the old savage think that he was like the wild beasts that are never ill? He wanted quinine.

He leaned the back of his head against the tree and closed his eyes. He thought feebly that if he could get hold of Lingard he would like to flay him alive; but it was only a blurred, a short and a passing thought. His imagination, exhausted by the repeated delineations of his own fate, had not enough strength left to grip the idea of revenge. He was not indignant and rebellious. He was cowed. He was cowed by the immense cataclysm of his disaster. Like most men, he had carried solemnly within his breast the whole universe, and the approaching end of all things in the destruction of his own personality filled him with paralyzing awe. Everything was toppling over. He blinked his eyes quickly, and it seemed to him that the very sunshine of the morning disclosed in its brightness a suggestion of some hidden and sinister meaning. In his unreasoning fear he tried to hide within himself. He drew his feet up, his head sank between his shoulders, his arms hugged his sides. Under the high and enormous tree soaring superbly out of the mist in a vigorous spread of lofty boughs, with a restless and eager flutter of its innumerable leaves in the clear sunshine, he remained motionless, huddled up on his seat: terrified and still.

Willems' gaze roamed over the ground, and then he watched with idiotic fixity half a dozen black ants entering courageously a tuft of long grass which, to them, must have appeared a dark and a dangerous jungle. Suddenly he thought: There must be something dead in there. Some dead insect. Death everywhere! He closed his eyes again in an access of trembling pain. Death everywhere—wherever one looks. He did not want to see the ants. He did not want to see anybody or anything. He sat in the darkness of his own making, reflecting bitterly that there was no peace for him. He heard voices now. . . . Illusion! Misery! Torment! Who would come? Who would speak to him? What business had he to hear voices? . . . yet he heard them faintly, from the river. Faintly, as if shouted far off over

there, came the words "We come back soon." . . . Delirium and mockery! Who would come back? Nobody ever comes back! Fever comes back. He had it on him this morning. That was it. . . . He heard unexpectedly the old woman muttering something near by. She had come round to his side of the tree. He opened his eyes and saw her bent back before him. She stood, with her hand shading her eyes, looking towards the landing-place. Then she glided away. She had seen—and now she was going back to her cooking; a woman incurious; expecting nothing; without fear and without hope.

She had gone back behind the tree, and now Willems could see a human figure on the path to the landing-place. It appeared to him to be a woman, in a red gown, holding some heavy bundle in her arms; it was an apparition unexpected, familiar and odd. He cursed through his teeth . . . It had wanted only this! See things like that in broad daylight! He was very bad—very bad. . . . He was horribly scared at this awful symptom of the desperate state of his health.

This scare lasted for the space of a flash of lightning, and in the next moment it was revealed to him that the woman was real; that she was coming towards him; that she was his wife! He put his feet down to the ground quickly, but made no other movement. His eyes opened wide. He was so amazed that for a time he absolutely forgot his own existence. The only idea in his head was: Why on earth did she come here?

Joanna was coming up the courtyard with eager hurried steps. She carried in her arms the child, wrapped up in one of Almayer's white blankets that she had snatched off the bed at the last moment, before leaving the house. She seemed to be dazed by the sun in her eyes; bewildered by her strange surroundings. She moved on, looking quickly right and left in impatient expectation of seeing her husband at any moment. Then, approaching the tree, she perceived suddenly a kind of dried-up, yellow corpse, sitting very stiff on a bench in the shade and looking at her with big eyes that were alive. That was her husband.

She stopped dead short. They stared at one another in profound stillness, with astounded eyes, with eyes maddened by the memories of things far off that seemed lost in the lapse of time. Their looks crossed, passed each other, and appeared to dart at them through fantastic distances, to come straight from the Incredible.

Looking at him steadily she came nearer, and deposited the blanket with the child in it on the bench. Little Louis, after howling with terror in the darkness of the river most of the night, now slept soundly and did not wake. Willems' eyes followed his

wife, his head turning slowly after her. He accepted her presence there with a tired acquiescence in its fabulous improbability. Anything might happen. What did she come for? She was part of the general scheme of his misfortune. He half expected that she would rush at him, pull his hair, and scratch his face. Why not? Anything might happen! In an exaggerated sense of his great bodily weakness he felt somewhat apprehensive of possible assault. At any rate, she would scream at him. He knew her of old. She could screech. He had thought that he was rid of her for ever. She came now probably to see the end. . . .

Suddenly she turned, and embracing him slid gently to the ground. This startled him. With her forehead on his knees she sobbed noiselessly. He looked down dismally at the top of her head. What was she up to? He had not the strength to move—to get away. He heard her whispering something, and bent over to listen. He caught the word “Forgive.”

That was what she came for! All that way. Women are queer. Forgive. Not he! . . . All at once this thought darted through his brain: How did she come? In a boat. Boat! boat!

He shouted “Boat!” and jumped up, knocking her over. Before she had time to pick herself up he pounced upon her and was dragging her up by the shoulders. No sooner had she regained her feet than she clasped him tightly round the neck, covering his face, his eyes, his mouth, his nose with desperate kisses. He dodged his head about, shaking her arms, trying to keep her off, to speak, to ask her. . . . She came in a boat, boat, boat! . . . They struggled and swung round, tramping in a semicircle. He blurted out, “Leave off. Listen,” while he tore at her hands. This meeting of lawful love and sincere joy resembled fight. Louis Willems slept peacefully under his blanket.

At last Willems managed to free himself, and held her off, pressing her arms down. He looked at her. He had half a suspicion that he was dreaming. Her lips trembled; her eyes wandered unsteadily, always coming back to his face. He saw her the same as ever, in his presence. She appeared startled, tremulous, ready to cry. She did not inspire him with confidence. He shouted—

“How did you come?”

She answered in hurried words, looking at him intently—

“In a big canoe with three men. I know everything. Lingard’s away. I come to save you. I know. . . . Almayer told me.”

“Canoe!—Almayer—Lies. Told you—You!” stammered Willems in a distracted manner. “Why you?—Told what?”

Words failed him. He stared at his wife, thinking with fear that she—stupid woman—had been made a tool in some plan of treachery . . . in some deadly plot.

She began to cry—

“Don’t look at me like that, Peter. What have I done? I come to beg—to beg—for forgiveness. . . . Save—Lingard—danger.”

He trembled with impatience, with hope, with fear. She looked at him and sobbed out in a fresh outburst of grief—

“Oh! Peter. What’s the matter?—Are you ill? . . . Oh! you look so ill . . .”

He shook her violently into terrified and wondering silence.

“How dare you!—I am well—perfectly well. . . . Where’s that boat? Will you tell me where that boat is—at last? The boat, I say . . . You! . . .”

“You hurt me,” she moaned.

He let her go, and, mastering her terror, she stood quivering and looking at him with strange intensity. Then she made a movement forward, but he lifted his finger, and she restrained herself with a long sigh. He calmed down suddenly and surveyed her with cold criticism, with the same appearance as when, in the old days, he used to find fault with the household expenses. She found a kind of fearful delight in this abrupt return into the past, into her old subjection.

He stood outwardly collected now, and listened to her disconnected story. Her words seemed to fall round him with the distracting clatter of stunning hail. He caught the meaning here and there, and straightway would lose himself in a tremendous effort to shape out some intelligible theory of events. There was a boat. A boat. A big boat that could take him to sea if necessary. That much was clear. She brought it. Why did Almayer lie to her so? Was it a plan to decoy him into some ambush? Better that than hopeless solitude. She had money. The men were ready to go anywhere . . . she said.

He interrupted her—

“Where are they now?”

“They are coming directly,” she answered, tearfully.

“Directly. There are some fishing stakes near here—they said. They are coming directly.”

Again she was talking and sobbing together. She wanted to be forgiven. Forgiven? What for? Ah! the scene in Macassar. As if he had time to think of that! What did he care what she had done months ago? He seemed to struggle in the toils of complicated dreams where everything was impossible, yet a matter of course, where the past took the aspects of the future and the present lay heavy on his heart—seemed to take him by the throat like the hand of an enemy. And while she begged, entreated, kissed his hands, wept on his shoulder, adjured him in the name of God, to forgive, to forget, to speak the word for which she

longed, to look at his boy, to believe in her sorrow and in her devotion—his eyes, in the fascinated immobility of shining pupils, looked far away, far beyond her, beyond the river, beyond this land, through days, weeks, months; looked into liberty, into the future, into his triumph . . . into the great possibility of a startling revenge.

He felt a sudden desire to dance and shout. He shouted—

"After all, we shall meet again, Captain Lingard."

"Oh, no! No!" she cried, joining her hands.

He looked at her with surprise. He had forgotten she was there till the break of her cry in the monotonous tones of her prayer recalled him into that courtyard from the glorious turmoil of his dreams. It was very strange to see her there—near him. He felt almost affectionate towards her. After all, she came just in time. Then he thought: That other one. I must get away without a scene. Who knows; she may be dangerous! . . . And all at once he felt he hated Aïssa with an immense hatred that seemed to choke him. He said to his wife—

"Wait a moment."

She, obedient, seemed to gulp down some words which wanted to come out. He muttered: "Stay here," and disappeared round the tree.

The water in the iron pan on the cooking fire boiled furiously, belching out volumes of white steam that mixed with the thin black thread of smoke. The old woman appeared to him through this as if in a fog, squatting on her heels, impassive and weird.

Willems came up near and asked, "Where is she?"

The woman did not even lift her head, but answered at once, readily, as though she had expected the question for a long time.

"While you were asleep under the tree, before the strange canoe came, she went out of the house. I saw her look at you and pass on with a great light in her eyes. A great light. And she went towards the place where our master Lakamba had his fruit trees. When we were many here. Many, many. Men with arms by their side. Many . . . men. And talk . . . and songs . . ."

She went on like that, raving gently to herself for a long time after Willems had left her.

Willems went back to his wife. He came up close to her and found he had nothing to say. Now all his faculties were concentrated upon his wish to avoid Aïssa. She might stay all the morning in that grove. Why did those rascally boatmen go? He had a physical repugnance to set eyes on her. And somewhere, at the very bottom of his heart, there was a fear of her. Why? What could she do? Nothing on earth could stop him now. He felt

strong, reckless, pitiless, and superior to everything. He wanted to preserve before his wife the lofty purity of his character. He thought: She does not know. Almayer held his tongue about Aïssa. But if she finds out, I am lost. If it hadn't been for the boy I would . . . free of both of them. . . . The idea darted through his head. Not he! Married. . . . Swore solemnly. No . . . sacred tie. . . . Looking on his wife, he felt for the first time in his life something approaching remorse. Remorse, arising from his conception of the awful nature of an oath before the altar. . . . She mustn't find out. . . . Oh, for that boat! He must run in and get his revolver. Couldn't think of trusting himself unarmed with those Bajow fellows. Get it now while she is away. Oh, for that boat! . . . He dared not go to the river and hail. He thought: She might hear me. . . . I'll go and get . . . cartridges . . . then will be all ready . . . nothing else. No.

And while he stood meditating profoundly before he could make up his mind to run to the house, Joanna pleaded, holding to his arm—pleaded despairingly, broken-hearted, hopeless whenever she glanced up at his face, which to her seemed to wear the aspect of unforgiving rectitude, of virtuous severity, of merciless justice. And she pleaded humbly—abashed before him, before the unmoved appearance of the man she had wronged in defiance of human and divine laws. He heard not a word of what she said till she raised her voice in a final appeal—

“ . . . Don't you see I loved you always? They told me horrible things about you. . . . My own mother! They told me—you have been—you have been unfaithful to me, and I . . . ”

“ It's a damned lie! ” shouted Willems, waking up for a moment into righteous indignation.

“ I know! I know—Be generous—Think of my misery since you went away—Oh! I could have torn my tongue out. . . . I will never believe anybody—Look at the boy—Be merciful—I could never rest till I found you. . . . Say—a word—one word . . . ”

“ What the devil do you want? ” exclaimed Willems, looking towards the river. “ Where's that damned boat? Why did you let them go away? You stupid! ”

“ Oh, Peter!—I know that in your heart you have forgiven me—You are so generous—I want to hear you say so. . . . Tell me—do you? ”

“ Yes! yes! ” said Willems, impatiently. “ I forgive you. Don't be a fool. ”

“ Don't go away. Don't leave me alone here. Where is the danger? I am so frightened. . . . Are you alone here? Sure? . . . Let us go away! ”

"That's sense," said Willems, still looking anxiously towards the river.

She sobbed gently, leaning on his arm.

"Let me go," he said.

He had seen above the steep bank the heads of three men glide along smoothly. Then, where the shore shelved down to the landing-place, appeared a big canoe which came slowly to land.

"Here they are," he went on, briskly. "I must get my revolver."

He made a few hurried paces towards the house, but seemed to catch sight of something, turned short round and came back to his wife. She stared at him, alarmed by the sudden change in his face. He appeared much discomposed. He stammered a little as he began to speak.

"Take the child. Walk down to the boat and tell them to drop it out of sight, quick, behind the bushes. Do you hear? Quick! I will come to you there directly. Hurry up!"

"Peter! What is it? I won't leave you. There is some danger in this horrible place."

"Will you do what I tell you?" said Willems, in an irritable whisper.

"No! no! no! I won't leave you. I will not lose you again. Tell me, what is it?"

From beyond the house came a faint voice singing. Willems shook his wife by the shoulder.

"Do what I tell you! Run at once!"

She gripped his arm and clung to him desperately. He looked up to heaven as if taking it to witness of that woman's infernal folly. The song grew louder, then ceased suddenly, and Aïssa appeared in sight, walking slowly, her hands full of flowers.

She had turned the corner of the house, coming out into the full sunshine, and the light seemed to leap upon her in a stream brilliant, tender, and caressing, as if attracted by the radiant happiness of her face. She had dressed herself for a festive day, for the memorable day of his return to her, of his return to an affection that would last for ever. The rays of the morning sun were caught by the oval clasp of the embroidered belt that held the silk sarong round her waist. The dazzling white stuff of her body jacket was crossed by a bar of yellow and silver of her scarf and in the black hair twisted high in her small head, shone the round balls of gold pins amongst crimson blossoms and white star-shaped flowers, with which she had crowned herself to charm his eyes; those eyes that were henceforth to see nothing in the world but her own resplendent image. And she moved slowly, bending her face over the mass of pure white champakas and

jasmine pressed to her breast, in a dreamy intoxication of sweet scents and of sweeter hopes.

She did not seem to see anything, stopped for a moment at the foot of the plankway leading to the house, then, leaving her high-heeled wooden sandals there, ascended the planks in a light run; straight, graceful, flexible, and noiseless, as if she had soared up to the door on invisible wings. Willems pushed his wife roughly behind the tree, and made up his mind quickly for a rush to the house, to grab his revolver and . . . Thoughts, doubts, expedients seemed to boil in his brain. He had a flashing vision of delivering a stunning blow, of tying up that flower bedecked woman in the dark house—a vision of things done swiftly with enraged haste—to save his prestige, his superiority—something of immense importance. . . . He had not made two steps when Joanna bounded after him, caught the back of his ragged jacket, tore out a big piece, and instantly hooked herself with both hands to the collar, nearly dragging him down on his back. Although taken by surprise, he managed to keep his feet. From behind she panted into his ear—

“That woman; Who’s that woman? Ah! that’s what those boatmen were talking about. I heard them . . . heard them . . . heard . . . in the night. They spoke about some woman. I dared not understand. I would not ask . . . listen . . . believe! How could I? Then it’s true. No. Say no. . . . Who’s that woman?”

He swayed, tugging forward. She jerked at him till the button gave way, and then he slipped half out of his jacket and, turning round, remained strangely motionless. His heart seemed to beat in his throat. He choked—tried to speak—could not find any words. He thought with fury: I will kill both of them.

For a second nothing moved about the courtyard in the great vivid clearness of the day. Only down by the landing-place a waringan-tree, all in a blaze of clustering red berries, seemed alive with the stir of little birds that filled with the feverish flutter of their feathers the tangle of overloaded branches. Suddenly the variegated flock rose spinning in a soft whirr and dispersed, slashing the sunlit haze with the sharp outlines of stiffened wings. Mahmat and one of his brothers appeared coming up from the landing-place, their lances in their hands, to look for their passengers.

Aïssa coming now empty-handed out of the house, caught sight of the two armed men. In her surprise she emitted a faint cry, vanished back and in a flash reappeared in the doorway with Willems’ revolver in her hand. To her the presence of any man there could only have an ominous meaning. There was nothing

in the outer world but enemies. She and the man she loved were alone, with nothing round them but menacing dangers. She did not mind that, for if death came, no matter from what hand, they would die together.

Her resolute eyes took in the courtyard in a circular glance. She noticed that the two strangers had ceased to advance and now were standing close together leaning on the polished shafts of their weapons. The next moment she saw Willems, with his back towards her, apparently struggling under the tree with some one. She saw nothing distinctly, and, unhesitating, flew down the plankway calling out: "I come!"

He heard her cry, and with an unexpected rush drove his wife backwards to the seat. She fell on it; he jerked himself altogether out of his jacket, and she covered her face with the soiled rags. He put his lips close to her, asking—

"For the last time, will you take the child and go?"

She groaned behind the unclean ruins of his upper garment. She mumbled something. He bent lower to hear. She was saying—

"I won't. Order that woman away. I can't look at her!"

"You fool!"

He seemed to spit the words at her, then, making up his mind, spun round to face Aïssa. She was coming towards them slowly now, with a look of unbounded amazement on her face. Then she stopped and stared at him—who stood there, stripped to the waist, bareheaded and sombre.

Some way off, Mahmat and his brother exchanged rapid words in calm undertones. . . . This was the strong daughter of the holy man who had died. The white man is very tall. There would be three women and the child to take in the boat, besides that white man who had the money. . . . The brother went away back to the boat, and Mahmat remained looking on. He stood like a sentinel, the leaf-shaped blade of his lance glinting above his head.

Willems spoke suddenly.

"Give me this," he said, stretching his hand towards the revolver.

Aïssa stepped back. Her lips trembled. She said very low: "Your people?"

He nodded slightly. She shook her head thoughtfully, and a few delicate petals of the flowers dying in her hair fell like big drops of crimson and white at her feet.

"Did you know?" she whispered.

"No!" said Willems. "They sent for me."

"Tell them to depart. They are accursed. What is there

between them and you—and you who carry my life in your heart!”

Willems said nothing. He stood before her looking down on the ground and repeating to himself: I must get that revolver away from her, at once, at once. I can't think of trusting myself with those men without firearms. I must have it.

She asked, after gazing in silence at Joanna, who was sobbing gently—

“Who is she?”

“My wife,” answered Willems, without looking up. “My wife according to our white law, which comes from God!”

“Your law! Your God!” murmured Aissa, contemptuously.

“Give me this revolver,” said Willems, in a peremptory tone. He felt an unwillingness to close with her, to get it by force.

She took no notice and went on—

“Your law . . . or your lies? What am I to believe? I came—I ran to defend you when I saw the strange men. You lied to me with your lips, with your eyes. You crooked heart! . . . Ah!” she added, after an abrupt pause. “She is the first! Am I then to be a slave?”

“You may be what you like,” said Willems, brutally. “I am going.”

Her gaze was fastened on the blanket under which she had detected a slight movement. She made a long stride towards it. Willems turned half round. His legs seemed to him to be made of lead. He felt faint and so weak, that for a moment, the fear of dying there where he stood, before he could escape from sin and disaster, passed through his mind in a wave of despair.

She lifted up one corner of the blanket, and when she saw the sleeping child a sudden quick shudder shook her as though she had seen something inexpressibly horrible. She looked at Louis Willems with eyes fixed in an unbelieving and terrified stare. Then her fingers opened slowly, and a shadow seemed to settle on her face as if something obscure and fatal had come between her and the sunshine. She stood looking down, absorbed, as though she had watched at the bottom of a gloomy abyss the mournful procession of her thoughts.

Willems did not move. All his faculties were concentrated upon the idea of his release. And it was only then that the assurance of it came to him with such force that he seemed to hear a loud voice shouting in the heavens that all was over, that in another five, ten minutes, he would step into another existence; that all this, the woman, the madness, the sin, the regrets, all would go, rush into the past, disappear, become as dust, as smoke, as drifting clouds—as nothing! Yes! All would vanish in the

unappeasable past which would swallow up all—even the very memory of his temptation and of his downfall. Nothing mattered. He cared for nothing. He had forgotten Aïssa, his wife, Lingard, Hudig—everybody, in the rapid vision of his hopeful future.

After a while he heard Aïssa saying—

“A child! A child! What have I done to be made to devour this sorrow and this grief? And while your man-child and the mother lived you told me there was nothing for you to remember in the land from which you came! And I thought you could be mine. I thought that I would . . .”

Her voice ceased in a broken murmur, and with it, in her heart, seemed to die the greater and most precious hope of her new life. She had hoped that in the future the frail arms of a child would bind their two lives together in a bond which nothing on earth could break, a bond of affection, of gratitude, of tender respect. She the first—the only one! But in the instant she saw the son of that other woman she felt herself removed into the cold, the darkness, the silence of a solitude impenetrable and immense—very far from him, beyond the possibility of any hope, into an infinity of wrongs without any redress.

She strode nearer to Joanna. She felt towards that woman anger, envy, jealousy. Before her she felt humiliated and enraged. She seized the hanging sleeve of the jacket in which Joanna was hiding her face and tore it out of her hands, exclaiming loudly—

“Let me see the face of her before whom I am only a servant and a slave. Ya-wa! I see you!”

Her unexpected shout seemed to fill the sunlit space of cleared grounds, rise high and run on far into the land over the unstirring tree-tops of the forests. She stood in sudden stillness, looking at Joanna with surprised contempt.

“A Sirani woman!” she said slowly, in a tone of wonder.

Joanna rushed at Willems—clung to him, shrieking: “Defend me, Peter! Defend me from that woman!”

“Be quiet. There is no danger,” muttered Willems, thickly.

Aïssa looked at them with scorn. “God is great! I sit in the dust at your feet,” she exclaimed jeeringly, joining her hands above her head in a gesture of mock humility. “Before you I am as nothing.” She turned to Willems fiercely, opening her arms wide. “What have you made of me?” she cried, “you lying child of an accursed mother! What have you made of me? The slave of a slave. Don’t speak! Your words are worse than the poison of snakes. A Sirani woman. A woman of a people despised by all.”

She pointed her finger at Joanna, stepped back, and began to laugh.

"Make her stop, Peter!" screamed Joanna. "That heathen woman. Heathen! Heathen! Beat her, Peter."

Willems caught sight of the revolver which Aïssa had laid on the seat near the child. He spoke in Dutch to his wife, without moving his head.

"Snatch the boy—and my revolver there. See. Run to the boat. I will keep her back. Now's the time."

Aïssa came nearer. She stared at Joanna, while between the short gusts of broken laughter she raved, fumbling distractedly at the buckle of her belt.

"To her! To her—the mother of him who will speak of your wisdom, of your courage. All to her. I have nothing. Nothing. Take, take."

She tore the belt off and threw it at Joanna's feet. She flung down with haste the armlets, the gold pins, the flowers; and the long hair, released, fell scattered over her shoulders, framing in its blackness the wild exaltation of her face.

"Drive her off, Peter. Drive off the heathen savage," persisted Joanna. She seemed to have lost her head altogether. She stamped, clinging to Willems' arm with both her hands.

"Look," cried Aïssa. "Look at the mother of your son! She is afraid. Why does she not go from before my face? Look at her. She is ugly."

Joanna seemed to understand the scornful tone of the words. As Aïssa stepped back again nearer to the tree she let go her husband's arm, rushed at her madly, slapped her face, then, swerving round, darted at the child who, unnoticed, had been wailing for some time, and snatching him up, flew down to the waterside, sending shriek after shriek in an access of insane terror.

Willems made for the revolver. Aïssa passed swiftly, giving him an unexpected push that sent him staggering away from the tree. She caught up the weapon, put it behind her back, and cried—

"You shall not have it. Go after her. Go to meet danger. . . . Go to meet death. . . . Go unarmed. . . . Go with empty hands and sweet words . . . as you came to me. . . . Go helpless and lie to the forests, to the sea . . . to the death that waits for you. . . ."

She ceased as if strangled. She saw in the horror of the passing seconds the half-naked, wild-looking man before her; she heard the faint shrillness of Joanna's insane shrieks for help somewhere down by the riverside. The sunlight streamed on her, on him, on the mute land, on the murmuring river—the gentle brilliance of a serene morning that, to her, seemed traversed by ghastly flashes of uncertain darkness. Hate filled the world, filled the space between them—the hate of race, the hate of hopeless diversity,

the hate of blood; the hate against the man born in the land of lies and of evil from which nothing but misfortune comes to those who are not white. And as she stood, maddened, she heard a whisper near her, the whisper of the dead Omar's voice saying in her ear: "Kill! Kill!"

She cried, seeing him move—

"Do not come near me . . . or you die now! Go while I remember yet . . . remember. . . ."

Willems pulled himself together for a struggle. He dared not go unarmed. He made a long stride, and saw her raise the revolver. He noticed that she had not cocked it, and said to himself that, even if she did fire, she would surely miss. Go too high; it was a stiff trigger. He made a step nearer—saw the long barrel moving unsteadily at the end of her extended arm. He thought: This is my time . . . He bent his knees slightly, throwing his body forward, and took off with a long bound for a tearing rush.

He saw a burst of red flame before his eyes, and was deafened by a report that seemed to him louder than a clap of thunder. Something stopped him short, and he stood aspiring in his nostrils the acrid smell of the blue smoke that drifted from before his eyes like an immense cloud. . . . Missed, by Heaven! . . . Thought so! . . . And he saw her very far off, throwing her arms up, while the revolver, very small, lay on the ground between them. . . . Missed! . . . He would go and pick it up now. Never before did he understand, as in that second, the joy, the triumphant delight of sunshine and of life. His mouth was full of something salt and warm. He tried to cough; spat out. . . . Who shrieks; In the name of God, he dies!—he dies—Who dies?—Must pick up—Night!—What? . . . Night, already. . . .

Many years afterwards Almayer was telling the story of the great revolution in Sambir to a chance visitor from Europe. He was a Roumanian, half naturalist, half orchid-hunter for commercial purposes, who used to declare to everybody, in the first five minutes of acquaintance, his intention of writing a scientific book about tropical countries. On his way to the interior he had quartered himself upon Almayer. He was a man of some education, but he drank his gin neat, or only, at most, would squeeze the juice of half a small lime into the raw spirit. He said it was good for his health, and, with that medicine before him, he would describe to the surprised Almayer the wonders of European capitals; while Almayer, in exchange, bored him by expounding, with gusto, his unfavourable opinions of Sambir's social and

political life. They talked far into the night, across the deal table on the verandah, while, between them, clear-winged, small, and flabby insects, dissatisfied with moonlight, streamed in and perished in thousands round the smoky light of the evil-smelling lamp.

Almayer, his face flushed, was saying—

“Of course, I did not see that. I told you I was stuck in the creek on account of father’s—Captain Lingard’s—susceptible temper. I am sure I did it all for the best in trying to facilitate the fellow’s escape; but Captain Lingard was that kind of man—you know—one couldn’t argue with. Just before sunset the water was high enough, and we got out of the creek. We got to Lakamba’s clearing about dark. All very quiet; I thought they were gone, of course, and felt very glad. We walked up the courtyard—saw a big heap of something lying in the middle. Out of that she rose and rushed at us. By God. . . . You know those stories of faithful dogs watching their masters’ corpses . . . don’t let anybody approach . . . got to beat them off—and all that. . . . Well, ’pon my word we had to beat her off. Had to! She was like a fury. Wouldn’t let us touch him. Dead—of course. Should think so. Shot through the lung, on the left side, rather high up, and at pretty close quarters too, for the two holes were small. Bullet came out through the shoulder-blade. After we had overpowered her—you can’t imagine how strong that woman was; it took three of us—we got the body into the boat and shoved off. We thought she had fainted then, but she got up and rushed into the water after us. Well, I let her clamber in. What could I do? The river’s full of alligators. I will never forget that pull up-stream in the night as long as I live. She sat in the bottom of the boat, holding his head in her lap, and now and again wiping his face with her hair. There was a lot of blood dried about his mouth and chin. And for all the six hours of that journey she kept on whispering tenderly to that corpse! . . . I had the mate of the schooner with me. The man said afterwards that he wouldn’t go through it again—not for a handful of diamonds. And I believed him—I did. It makes me shiver. Do you think he heard? No! I mean somebody—something—heard? . . .”

“I am a materialist,” declared the man of science, tilting the bottle shakily over the emptied glass.

Almayer shook his head and went on—

“Nobody saw how it really happened but that man Mahmat. He always said that he was no further off from them than two lengths of his lance. It appears the two women rowed each other while that Willems stood between them. Then Mahmat says that when Joanna struck her and ran off, the other two seemed to

become suddenly mad together. They rushed here and there. Mahmat says—those were his very words; ‘I saw her standing holding the pistol that fires many times and pointing it all over the campong. I was afraid—lest she might shoot me, and jumped on one side. Then I saw the white man coming at her swiftly. He came like our master the tiger when he rushes out of the jungle at the spears held by men. She did not take aim. The barrel of her weapon went like this—from side to side, but in her eyes I could see suddenly a great fear. There was only one shot. She shrieked while the white man stood blinking his eyes and very straight, till you could count slowly one, two, three; then he coughed and fell on his face. The daughter of Omar shrieked without drawing breath, till he fell. I went away then and left silence behind me. These things did not concern me, and in my boat there was that other woman who had promised me money. We left directly, paying no attention to her cries. We are only poor men—and had but a small reward for our trouble!’ That’s what Mahmat said. Never varied. You ask him yourself. He’s the man you hired the boats from, for your journey up the river.”

“The most rapacious thief I ever met!” exclaimed the traveller, thickly.

“Ah! He is a respectable man. His two brothers got themselves speared—served them right. They went in for robbing Dyak graves. Gold ornaments in them you know. Serve them right. But he kept respectable and got on. Aye! Everybody got on—but I. And all through that scoundrel who brought the Arabs here.”

“*De mortuis nil ni . . . num*,” muttered Almayer’s guest.

“I wish you would speak English instead of jabbering in your own language, which no one can understand,” said Almayer, sulkily.

“Don’t be angry,” hiccoughed the other. “It’s Latin, and it’s wisdom. It means: Don’t waste your breath in abusing shadows. No offence there. I like you. You have a quarrel with Providence—so have I. I was meant to be a professor, while—look.”

His head nodded. He sat grasping the glass. Almayer walked up and down, then stopped suddenly.

“Yes, they all got on but I. Why? I am better than any of them. Lakamba calls himself a Sultan, and when I go to see him on business sends that one-eyed fiend of his—Babalatchi—to tell me that the ruler is asleep; and shall sleep for a long time. And that Babalatchi! He is the Shahbandar of the State—if you please. Oh Lord! Shahbandar! The pig! A vagabond I wouldn’t let come up these steps when he first came here. . . . Look at Abdulla now. He lives here because—he says—here he is away

from white men. But he has hundreds of thousands. Has a house in Penang. Ships. What did he not have when he stole my trade from me! He knocked everything here into a cocked hat; drove father to gold-hunting—then to Europe, where he disappeared. Fancy a man like Captain Lingard disappearing as though he had been a common coolie. Friends of mine wrote to London asking about him. Nobody even heard of him there! Fancy! Never heard of Captain Lingard!”

The learned gatherer of orchids lifted his head.

“He was a sen—sentimen—tal old buc—buccaneer,” he stammered out, “I like him. I’m sent—tal myself.”

He winked slowly at Almayer, who laughed.

“Yes! I told you about that gravestone. Yes! Another hundred and twenty dollars thrown away. Wish I had them now. He would do it. And the inscription. Ha! ha! ha! ‘Peter Willems, Delivered by the Mercy of God from his Enemy.’ What enemy—unless Captain Lingard himself? And then it has no sense. He was a great man—father was—but strange in many ways. . . . You haven’t seen the grave? On the top of that hill, there, on the other side of the river. I must show you. We will go there.”

“Not I!” said the other. “No interest—in the sun—too tiring . . . Unless you carry me there.”

As a matter of fact he was carried there a few months afterwards, and his was the second white man’s grave in Sambir; but at present he was alive if rather drunk. He asked abruptly—

“And the woman?”

“Oh! Lingard, of course, kept her and her ugly brat in Macassar. Sinful waste of money—that! Devil only knows what became of them since father went home. I had my daughter to look after. I shall give you a word to Mrs. Vinck in Singapore when you go back. You shall see my Nina there. Lucky man. She is beautiful, and I hear so accomplished, so . . .”

“I have heard already twenty . . . a hundred times about your daughter. What ab—about—that—that other one, Ai—ssa?”

“She! Oh! we kept her here. She was mad for a long time in a quiet sort of way. Father thought a lot of her. He gave her a house to live in, in my campong. She wandered about, speaking to nobody unless she caught sight of Abdulla, when she would have a fit of fury, and shriek and curse like anything. Very often she would disappear—and then we all had to turn out and hunt for her, because father would worry till she was brought back. Found her in all kinds of places. Once in the abandoned campong of Lakamba. Sometimes simply wandering in the bush. She had one favourite spot we always made for at first. It was ten to

one on finding her there—a kind of a grassy glade on the banks of a small brook. Why she preferred that place, I can't imagine! And such a job to get her away from there. Had to drag her away by main force. Then, as the time passed, she became quieter and more settled like. Still, all my people feared her greatly. It was my Nina that tamed her. You see the child was naturally tearless and used to have her own way, so she would go to her and pull at her sarong, and order her about, as she did everybody. Finally she, I verily believe, came to love the child. Nothing could resist that little one—you know. She made a capital nurse. Once when the little devil ran away from me and fell into the river off the end of the jetty, she jumped in and pulled her out in no time. I very nearly died of fright. Now of course she lives with my serving girls, but does what she likes. As long as I have a handful of rice or a piece of cotton in the store she sha'n't want for anything. You have seen her. She brought in the dinner with Ali."

"What! That doubled-up crone?"

"Ah!" said Almayer. "They age quickly here. And long foggy nights spent in the bush will soon break the strongest backs—as you will find out yourself soon."

"Dis . . . disgusting," growled the traveller.

He dozed off. Almayer stood by the balustrade looking out at the bluish sheen of the moonlit night. The forests, unchanged and sombre, seemed to hang over the water, listening to the unceasing whisper of the great river; and above their dark wall the hill on which Lingard had buried the body of his late prisoner rose in a black, rounded mass, upon the silver paleness of the sky. Almayer looked for a long time at the clean-cut outline of the summit, as if trying to make out through darkness and distance the shape of that expensive tombstone. When he turned round at last he saw his guest sleeping, his arms on the table, his head on his arms.

"Now, look here!" he shouted, slapping the table with the palm of his hand.

The naturalist woke up, and sat all in a heap, staring owlishly.

"Here!" went on Almayer, speaking very loud and thumping the table, "I want to know. You, who say you have read all the books, just tell me . . . why such infernal things are ever allowed. Here I am! Done harm to nobody, lived an honest life . . . and a scoundrel like that is born in Rotterdam or some such place at the other end of the world somewhere, travels out here, robs his employer, runs away from his wife, and ruins me and my Nina—he ruined me, I tell you—and gets himself shot at last by a poor miserable savage, that knows nothing at all about him really.

Where's the sense of all this? Where's your Providence? Where's the good for anybody in all this? The world's a swindle! A swindle! Why should I suffer? What have I done to be treated so?"

He howled out his string of questions, and suddenly became silent. The man who ought to have been a professor made a tremendous effort to articulate distinctly—

"My dear fellow, don't—don't you see that the ba—bare fac—the fact of your existence is off—offensive. . . . I—I like you—like . . ."

He fell forward on the table, and ended his remarks by an unexpected and prolonged snore.

Almayer shrugged his shoulders and walked back to the balustrade. He drank his own trade gin very seldom, but, when he did, a ridiculously small quantity of the stuff could induce him to assume a rebellious attitude towards the scheme of the universe. And now, throwing his body over the rail, he shouted impudently into the night, turning his face towards that far-off and invisible slab of imported granite upon which Lingard had thought fit to record God's mercy and Willems' escape.

"Father was wrong—wrong!" he yelled. "I want you to smart for it. You must smart for it! Where are you, Willems? Hey? . . . Hey? . . . Where there is no mercy for you—I hope!"

"Hope," repeated in a whispering echo the startled forests, the river and the hills; and Almayer, who stood waiting, with a smile of tipsy attention on his lips, heard no other answer.

THE END

ALMAYER'S FOLLY
A Story of an Eastern River

*Qui de nous
n'a eu sa terre promise,
son jour d'extase
et sa fin en exil*

AMIEL

To
the memory
of
T. B.

"KASPAR! Makan!"

The well-known shrill voice startled Almayer from his dreams of splendid future into the unpleasant realities of the present hour. An unpleasant voice too. He had heard it for many years, and with every year he liked it less. No matter; there would be an end to all this soon.

He shuffled uneasily, but took no further notice of the call. Leaning with both his elbows on the balustrade of the verandah, he went on looking fixedly at the great river that flowed—indifferent and hurried—before his eyes. He liked to look at it about the time of sunset; perhaps because at that time the sinking sun would spread a glowing gold tinge on the waters of the Pantai, and Almayer's thoughts were often busy with gold; gold he had failed to secure; gold the others had secured—dishonestly, of course—or gold he meant to secure yet, through his own honest exertions, for himself and Nina. He absorbed himself in his dream of wealth and power away from this coast where he had dwelt for so many years, forgetting the bitterness of toil and strife in the vision of a great and splendid reward. They would live in Europe, he and his daughter. They would be rich and respected. Nobody would think of her mixed blood in the presence of her great beauty and of his immense wealth. Witnessing her triumphs he would grow young again, he would forget the twenty-five years of heart-breaking struggle on this coast where he felt like a prisoner. All this was nearly within his reach. Let only Dain return! And return soon he must—in his own interest, for his own share. He was now more than a week late! Perhaps he would return to-night.

Such were Almayer's thoughts as, standing on the verandah of his new but already decaying house—that last failure of his life—he looked on the broad river. There was no tinge of gold on it this evening, for it had been swollen by the rains, and rolled an angry and muddy flood under his inattentive eyes, carrying small drift-wood and big dead logs, and whole uprooted trees with branches and foliage, amongst which the water swirled and roared angrily.

One of those drifting trees grounded on the shelving shore, just by the house, and Almayer, neglecting his dream, watched

it with languid interest. The tree swung slowly round, amid the hiss and foam of the water, and soon-getting free of the obstruction began to move down stream again, rolling slowly over, raising upwards a long, denuded branch, like a hand lifted in mute appeal to heaven against the river's brutal and unnecessary violence. Almayer's interest in the fate of that tree increased rapidly. He leaned over to see if it would clear the low point below. It did; then he drew back, thinking that now its course was free down to the sea, and he envied the lot of that inanimate thing now growing small and indistinct in the deepening darkness. As he lost sight of it altogether he began to wonder how far out to sea it would drift. Would the current carry it north or south? South, probably, till it drifted in sight of Celebes, as far as Macassar, perhaps!

Macassar! Almayer's quickened fancy distanced the tree on its imaginary voyage, but his memory lagging behind some twenty years or more in point of time saw a young and slim Almayer, clad all in white and modest-looking, landing from the Dutch mail-boat on the dusty jetty of Macassar, coming to woo fortune in the godowns of old Hudig. It was an important epoch in his life, the beginning of a new existence for him. His father, a subordinate official employed in the Botanical Gardens of Buitenzorg, was no doubt delighted to place his son in such a firm. The young man himself too was nothing loth to leave the poisonous shores of Java, and the meagre comforts of the parental bungalow, where the father grumbled all day at the stupidity of native gardeners, and the mother from the depths of her long easy-chair bewailed the lost glories of Amsterdam, where she had been brought up, and of her position as the daughter of a cigar dealer there.

Almayer had left his home with a light heart and a lighter pocket, speaking English well, and strong in arithmetic; ready to conquer the world, never doubting that he would.

After those twenty years, standing in the close and stifling heat of a Bornean evening, he recalled with pleasurable regret the image of Hudig's lofty and cool warehouses with their long and straight avenues of gin cases and bales of Manchester goods; the big door swinging noiselessly; the dim light of the place, so delightful after the glare of the streets; the little railed-off spaces amongst piles of merchandise where the Chinese clerks, neat, cool, and sad-eyed, wrote rapidly and in silence amidst the din of the working gangs rolling casks or shifting cases to a muttered song, ending with a desperate yell. At the upper end, facing the great door, there was a larger space railed off, well lighted; there the noise was subdued by distance, and above it rose the

soft and continuous clink of silver guilders which other discreet Chinamen were counting and piling up under the supervision of Mr. Vinck, the cashier, the genius presiding in the place—the right hand of the Master.

In that clear space Almayer worked at his table not far from a little green painted door, by which always stood a Malay in a red sash and turban, and whose hand, holding a small string dangling from above, moved up and down with the regularity of a machine. The string worked a punkah on the other side of the green door, where the so-called private office was, and where old Hudig—the Master—sat enthroned, holding noisy receptions. Sometimes the little door would fly open disclosing to the outer world, through the bluish haze of tobacco smoke, a long table loaded with bottles of various shapes and tall water pitchers, rattan easy-chairs occupied by noisy men in sprawling attitudes, while the Master would put his head through and, holding by the handle, would grunt confidentially to Vinck; perhaps send an order thundering down the warehouse, or spy a hesitating stranger and greet him with a friendly roar, "Welcome, Gapitan! ver' you come vrom? Bali, eh? Got bonies? I vant bonies! Vant all you got; ha! ha! ha! Come in!" Then the stranger was dragged in, in a tempest of yells, the door was shut, and the usual noises refilled the place; the song of the workmen, the rumble of barrels, the scratch of rapid pens; while above all rose the musical chink of broad silver pieces streaming ceaselessly through the yellow fingers of the attentive Chinamen.

At that time Macassar was teeming with life and commerce. It was the point in the islands where tended all those bold spirits who, fitting out schooners on the Australian coast, invaded the Malay Archipelago in search of money and adventure. Bold, reckless, keen in business, not disinclined for a brush with the pirates that were to be found on many a coast as yet, making money fast, they used to have a general "rendezvous" in the bay for purposes of trade and dissipation. The Dutch merchants called those men English pedlars; some of them were undoubtedly gentlemen for whom that kind of life had a charm; most were seamen; the acknowledged king of them all was Tom Lingard, he whom the Malays, honest or dishonest, quiet fishermen or desperate cut-throats, recognized as "the Rajah-Laut"—the King of the Sea.

Almayer had heard of him before he had been three days in Macassar, had heard the stories of his smart business transactions, his loves, and also of his desperate fights with the Sulu pirates, together with the romantic tale of some child—a girl—found in a piratical prau by the victorious Lingard, when, after a long

contest, he boarded the craft, driving crew overboard. This girl, it was generally known, Lingard had adopted, was having her educated in some convent in Java, and spoke of her as "my daughter." He had sworn a mighty oath to marry her to a white man before he went home and to leave her all his money. "And Captain Lingard has lots of money," would say Mr. Vinck solemnly, with his head on one side, "lots of money; more than Hudig!" And after a pause—just to let his hearers recover from their astonishment at such an incredible assertion—he would add in an explanatory whisper, "You know, he has discovered a river."

That was it! He had discovered a river! That was the fact placing old Lingard so much above the common crowd of sea-going adventurers who traded with Hudig in the daytime and drank champagne, gambled, sang noisy songs, and made love to half-caste girls under the broad verandah of the Sunda Hotel at night. Into that river, whose entrances himself only knew, Lingard used to take his assorted cargo of Manchester goods, brass gongs, rifles and gunpowder. His brig *Flash*, which he commanded himself, would on those occasions disappear quietly during the night from the roadstead while his companions were sleeping off the effects of the midnight carouse, Lingard seeing them drunk under the table before going on board, himself unaffected by any amount of liquor. Many tried to follow him and find that land of plenty for gutta-percha and rattans, pearl shells and birds' nests, wax and gum-dammar, but the little *Flash* could outsail every craft in those seas. A few of them came to grief on hidden sandbanks and coral reefs, losing their all and barely escaping with life from the cruel grip of this sunny and smiling sea; others got discouraged; and for many years the green and peaceful-looking islands guarding the entrances to the promised land kept their secret with all the merciless serenity of tropical nature. And so Lingard came and went on his secret or open expeditions, becoming a hero in Almayer's eyes by the boldness and enormous profits of his ventures. seeming to Almayer a very great man indeed as he saw him marching up the warehouse, grunting a "how are you?" to Vinck, or greeting Hudig, the Master, with a boisterous "Hallo, old pirate! Alive yet?" as a preliminary to transacting business behind the little green door. Often of an evening, in the silence of the then deserted warehouse, Almayer putting away his papers before driving home with Mr. Vinck, in whose household he lived, would pause listening to the noise of a hot discussion in the private office, would hear the deep and monotonous growl of the Master, and the roared-out interruptions of Lingard—two mastiffs fighting over a marrowy bone. But to

Almayer's ears it sounded like a quarrel of Titans—a battle of the gods.

After a year or so Lingard, having been brought often in contact with Almayer in the course of business, took a sudden and, to the onlookers, a rather inexplicable fancy to the young man. He sang his praises, late at night, over a convivial glass to his cronies in the Sunda Hotel, and one fine morning electrified Vinck by declaring that he must have "that young fellow for a supercargo. Kind of captain's clerk. Do all my quill-driving for me." Hudig consented. Almayer, with youth's natural craving for change, was nothing loth, and packing his few belongings, started in the *Flash* on one of those long cruises when the old seaman was wont to visit almost every island in the archipelago. Months slipped by, and Lingard's friendship seemed to increase. Often pacing the deck with Almayer, when the faint night breeze, heavy with aromatic exhalations of the islands, shoved the brig gently along under the peaceful and sparkling sky, did the old seaman open his heart to his entranced listener. He spoke of his past life, of escaped dangers, of big profits in his trade, of new combinations that were in the future to bring profits bigger still. Often he had mentioned his daughter, the girl found in the pirate prau, speaking of her with a strange assumption of fatherly tenderness. "She must be a big girl now," he used to say. "It's nigh unto four years since I have seen her! Damme, Almayer, if I don't think we will run into Sourabaya this trip." And after such a declaration he always dived into his cabin muttering to himself, "Something must be done—must be done." More than once he would astonish Almayer by walking up to him rapidly, clearing his throat with a powerful "Hem!" as if he intended to say something, and then turning abruptly away to lean over the bulwarks in silence, and watch, motionless, for hours, the gleam and sparkle of the phosphorescent sea along the ship's side. It was the night before arriving in Sourabaya when one of those attempts at confidential communication succeeded. After clearing his throat he spoke. He spoke to some purpose. He wanted Almayer to marry his adopted daughter. "And don't you kick because you're white!" he shouted, suddenly, not giving the surprised young man the time to say a word. "None of that with me! Nobody will see the colour of your wife's skin. The dollars are too thick for that, I tell you! And mind you, they will be thicker yet before I die. There will be millions, Kaspar! Millions I say! And all for her—and for you, if you do what you are told."

Startled by the unexpected proposal, Almayer hesitated, and remained silent for a minute. He was gifted with a strong and active imagination, and in that short space of time he saw, as in a

flash of dazzling light, great piles of shining guilders, and realized all the possibilities of an opulent existence. The consideration, the indolent ease of life—for which he felt himself so well fitted—his ships, his warehouses, his merchandise (old Lingard would not live for ever), and, crowning all, in the far future gleamed like a fairy palace the big mansion in Amsterdam, that earthly paradise of his dreams, where made king amongst men by old Lingard's money, he would pass the evenings of his days in inexpressible splendour. As to the other side of the picture—the companionship for life of a Malay girl, that legacy of a boatful of pirates—there was only within him a confused consciousness of shame that he a white man— Still, a convent education of four years—and then she may mercifully die. He was always lucky, and money is powerful! Go through it. Why not? He had a vague idea of shutting her up somewhere, anywhere, out of his gorgeous future. Easy enough to dispose of a Malay woman, a slave, after all, to his Eastern mind, convent or no convent, ceremony or no ceremony.

He lifted his head and confronted the anxious yet irate seaman.

"I—I of course—anything you wish, Captain Lingard."

"Call me father, my boy. She does," said the mollified old adventurer. "Damme, though, if I didn't think you were going to refuse. Mind you, Kaspar, I always get my way, so it would have been no use. But you are no fool."

He remembered well that time—the look, the accent, the words, the effect they produced on him, his very surroundings. He remembered the narrow slanting deck of the brig, the silent sleeping coast, the smooth black surface of the sea with a great bar of gold laid on it by the rising moon. He remembered it all, and he remembered his feelings of mad exultation at the thought of that fortune thrown into his hands. He was no fool then, and he was no fool now. Circumstances had been against him; the fortune was ~~gone~~, but hope remained.

He shivered in the night air, and suddenly became aware of the intense darkness which, on the sun's departure, had closed in upon the river, blotting out the outlines of the opposite shore. Only the fire of dry branches lit outside the stockade of the Rajah's compound called fitfully into view the ragged trunks of the surrounding trees, putting a stain of glowing red half-way across the river where the drifting logs were hurrying toward the sea through the impenetrable gloom. He had a hazy recollection of having been called some time during the evening by his wife. To his dinner probably. But a man busy contemplating the wreckage of his past in the dawn of new hopes cannot be hungry whenever his rice is ready. Time he went home, though; it was getting late.

He stepped cautiously on the loose planks towards the ladder. A lizard, disturbed by the noise, emitted a plaintive note and scurried through the long grass growing on the bank. Almayer descended the ladder carefully, now thoroughly recalled to the realities of life by the care necessary to prevent a fall on the uneven ground where the stones, decaying planks, and half-sawn beams were piled up in inextricable confusion. As he turned towards the house where he lived—"my old house" he called it—his ear detected the splash of paddles away in the darkness of the river. He stood still in the path, attentive and surprised at anybody being on the river at this late hour during such a heavy freshet. Now he could hear the paddles distinctly, and even a rapidly exchanged word in low tones, the heavy breathing of men fighting with the current, and hugging the bank on which he stood. Quite close, too, but it was too dark to distinguish anything under the overhanging bushes.

"Arabs, no doubt," muttered Almayer to himself, peering into the solid blackness. "What are they up to now? Some of Abdulla's business; curse him!"

The boat was very close now.

"Oh, ya! Man!" hailed Almayer.

The sound of voices ceased, but the paddles worked as furiously as before. Then the bush in front of Almayer shook, and the sharp sound of the paddles falling into the canoe rang in the quiet night. They were holding on to the bush now; but Almayer could hardly make out an indistinct dark shape of a man's head and shoulders above the bank.

"You, Abdulla?" said Almayer, doubtfully.

A grave voice answered—

"Tuan Almayer is speaking to a friend. There is no Arab here."

Almayer's heart gave a great leap.

"Dain!" he exclaimed. "At last! at last! I have been waiting for you every day and every night. I had nearly given you up."

"Nothing could have stopped me from coming back here," said the other, almost violently. "Not even death," he whispered to himself.

"This is a friend's talk, and is very good," said Almayer, heartily. "Drop down to the jetty and let your men cook their rice in my campong while we talk in the house."

There was no answer to that invitation.

"What is it?" asked Almayer, uneasily. "There is nothing wrong with the brig, I hope?"

"The brig is where no Orang Blanda can lay his hands on her,"

said Dain, with a gloomy tone in his voice, which Almayer, in his elation, failed to notice.

"Right," he said. "But where are all your men? There are only two with you."

"Listen, Tuan Almayer," said Dain. "To-morrow's sun shall see me in your house, and then we will talk. Now I must go to the Rajah."

"To the Rajah! Why? What do you want with Lakamba?"

"Tuan, to-morrow we talk like friends. I must see Lakamba to-night."

"Dain, you are not going to abandon me now, when all is ready?" asked Almayer, in a pleading voice.

"Have I not returned? But I must see Lakamba first for your good and mine."

The shadowy head disappeared abruptly. The bush, released from the grasp of the bowman, sprung back with a swish, scattering a shower of muddy water over Almayer, as he bent forward, trying to see.

In a little while the canoe shot into the streak of light that streamed on the river from the big fire on the opposite shore, disclosing the outline of two men bending to their work, and a third figure in the stern flourishing the steering paddle, his head covered with an enormous round hat, like a fantastically exaggerated mushroom.

Almayer watched the canoe till it passed out of the line of light. Shortly after the murmur of many voices reached him across the water. He could see the torches being snatched out of the burning pile, and rendering visible for a moment the gate in the stockade round which they crowded. Then they went in; the torches disappeared, and the scattered fire sent out only a dim and fitful glare.

Almayer stepped homewards with long strides and mind uneasy. Surely Dain was not thinking of playing him false. It was absurd. Dain and Lakamba were both too much interested in the success of his scheme. Trusting to Malays was poor work; but then even Malays have some sense and understand their own interest. All would be well—must be well. At this point in his meditation he found himself at the foot of the steps leading to the verandah of his home. From the low point of land where he stood he could see both branches of the river. The main stream of the Pantai was lost in complete darkness, for the fire at the Rajah's had gone out altogether; but up the Sambir reach his eye could follow the long line of Malay houses crowding the bank, with here and there a dim light twinkling through bamboo walls, or a smoky torch burning on the platforms built out over the river.

Further away, where the island ended in a low cliff, rose a dark mass of buildings towering above the Malay structures. Founded solidly on a firm ground with plenty of space, starred by many lights burning strong and white, with a suggestion of paraffin and lamp-glasses, stood the house and the godowns of Abdulla bin Selim, the great trader of Sambir. To Almayer the sight was very distasteful, and he shook his fist towards the buildings that in their evident prosperity looked to him cold and insolent, and contemptuous of his own fallen fortunes.

He mounted the steps of his house slowly.

In the middle of the verandah there was a round table. On it a paraffin lamp without a globe shed a hard glare on the three inner sides. The fourth side was open, and faced the river. Between the rough supports of the high-pitched roof hung torn rattan screens. There was no ceiling, and the harsh brilliance of the lamp was toned above into a soft half-light that lost itself in the obscurity amongst the rafters. The front wall was cut in two by the doorway of a central passage closed by a red curtain. The women's room opened into that passage, which led to the back courtyard and to the cooking shed. In one of the side walls there was a doorway. Half obliterated words—"Office: Lingard and Co."—were still legible on the dusty door, which looked as if it had not been opened for a very long time. Close to the other side wall stood a bent-wood rocking chair, and by the table and about the verandah four wooden armchairs straggled forlornly, as if ashamed of their shabby surroundings. A heap of common mats lay in one corner, with an old hammock slung diagonally above. In the other corner, his head wrapped in a piece of red calico, huddled into a shapeless heap, slept a Malay, one of Almayer's domestic slaves—"my own people," he used to call them. A numerous and representative assembly of moths were holding high revels round the lamp to the spirited music of swarming mosquitoes. Under the palm-leaf thatch lizards raced on the beams calling softly. A monkey, chained to one of the verandah supports—retired for the night under the eaves—peered and grinned at Almayer, as it swung to one of the bamboo roof sticks and caused a shower of dust and bits of dried leaves to settle on the shabby table. The floor was uneven, with many withered plants and dried earth scattered about. A general air of squalid neglect pervaded the place. The light breeze from the river swayed gently the tattered blinds, sending from the woods opposite a faint and sickly perfume as of decaying flowers.

Under Almayer's heavy tread the boards of the verandah creaked loudly. The sleeper in the corner moved uneasily, muttering indistinct words. There was a slight rustle behind the

curtained doorway, and a soft voice asked in Malay, "Is it you, father?"

"Yes, Nina. I am hungry. Is everybody asleep in this house?"

Almayer spoke jovially and dropped with a contented sigh into the armchair nearest to the table. Nina Almayer came through the curtained doorway followed by an old Malay woman, who busied herself in setting upon the table a plateful of rice and fish, a jar of water and a bottle half full of genever. After carefully placing before her master a cracked glass tumbler and a tin spoon she went away noiselessly. Nina stood by the table, one hand lightly resting on its edge, the other hanging listlessly by her side. Her face turned towards the outer darkness, through which her dreamy eyes seemed to see some entrancing picture, wore a look of impatient expectancy. She was tall for a half-caste, with the correct profile of the father, modified and strengthened by the squareness of the lower part of the face inherited from her maternal ancestors—the Sulu pirates. Her firm mouth, with the lips slightly parted and disclosing a gleam of white teeth, put a vague suggestion of ferocity into the impatient expression of her features. And yet her dark and perfect eyes had all the tender softness common to Malay women, but with a gleam of superior intelligence; they looked out gravely, wide open and steady, as if facing something invisible to all other eyes. She stood there all in white, straight, flexible, graceful, unconscious of herself, her low but broad forehead crowned with a shining mass of long black hair that fell in heavy tresses over her shoulders, and made her pale olive complexion look paler still by the contrast of its coal-black hue.

Almayer attacked his rice greedily, but after a few mouthfuls he paused, spoon in hand, and looked at his daughter curiously.

"Did you hear a boat pass about half an hour ago, Nina?" he asked.

The girl gave him a quick glance, and moving away from the light stood with her back to the table.

"I heard nothing," she said, slowly.

"There was a boat. At last! Dain-himself; and he went on to Lakamba. I know it, for he told me so. I spoke to him, but he would not come here to-night. Promised to come to-morrow."

He swallowed another spoonful, then said—

"I am almost happy to-night, Nina. I can see the end of a long road, and it leads us away from this miserable swamp. We shall soon get away from here, I and you, my dear little girl, and then——"

He rose from the table and stood looking fixedly before him as if contemplating some enchanting vision.

"And then," he went on, "we shall be happy, you and I. Live rich and respected far from here, and forget this life, and all this struggle, and all this misery."

He approached his daughter and passed his hand caressing over her hair.

"It is bad to have to trust a Malay," he said, "but I must own that this Dain is a perfect gentleman—a perfect gentleman," he repeated.

"Did you ask him to come here, father?" inquired Nina, not looking at him.

"Well, of course. We shall start on the day after to-morrow," said Almayer, joyously. "We must not lose any time. Are you glad, little girl?"

She was as tall as himself, but he liked to recall the time when she was little and they were all in all to each other.

"I am glad," she said, very low.

"Of course," said Almayer, vivaciously, "you cannot imagine what is before you. I myself have not been to Europe, but I have heard my mother talk so often that I seem to know all about it. We shall live a—a glorious life, You shall see."

Again he stood silent by his daughter's side looking at that enchanting vision. After a while he shook his fist towards the sleeping settlement.

"Ah! my friend Abdulla," he cried, "we shall see who will have the best of it after all these years!"

He looked up the river and remarked calmly:

"Another thunderstorm. Well! No thunder will keep me awake to-night, I know! Good-night, little girl," he whispered tenderly, kissing her cheek. "You do not seem to be very happy to-night, but to-morrow you will show a brighter face. Eh?"

Nina had listened to her father, unmoved, with her half-closed eyes still gazing into the night now made more intense by a heavy thunder-cloud that had crept down from the hills blotting out the stars, merging sky, forest, and river into one mass of almost palpable blackness. The faint breeze had died out, but the distant rumble of thunder and pale flashes of lightning gave warning of the approaching storm. With a sigh the girl turned towards the table.

Almayer was in his hammock now, already half asleep.

"Take the lamp, Nina," he muttered, drowsily. "This place is full of mosquitoes. Go to sleep, daughter."

But Nina put the lamp out and turned back again towards the balustrade of the verandah. She stood with her arm round the wooden support looking eagerly towards the Pantai reach. And motionless there in the oppressive calm of the tropical night

she could see at each flash of lightning the forest lining both banks up the river, bending before the furious blast of wind the upper reach of the river whipped into white foam, and the black clouds torn into fantastic shapes trailing low over the swaying trees. Round her all was as yet stillness and peace, but she could hear afar off the driving roar, and hiss of heavy rain, the wash of the waves on the tormented river. It came nearer and nearer, with loud thunder-claps and long flashes of vivid lightning, followed by short periods of appalling blackness. When the storm reached the low point dividing the river, the whole house shook while the rain pattered loudly on the palm-leaf roof. The thunder spoke in one prolonged roll, and the incessant lightning disclosed a turmoil of leaping waters, driving logs, and the big trees bending before a brutal and merciless force.

Undisturbed by the nightly event of the rainy monsoon, the father slept quietly, oblivious alike of his hopes, his misfortunes, his friends, and his enemies; and the daughter stood motionless, at each flash of lightning eagerly scanning the broad river with a steady and anxious gaze.

2

WHEN, in compliance with Lingard's abrupt demand, Almayer consented to wed the Malay girl, no one knew that on the day when the interesting young convert had lost all her natural relations and found a white father, she had been fighting desperately like the rest of them on board the prau, and was only prevented from leaping overboard, like the few other survivors, by a severe wound in the leg. There, on the fore-deck of the prau, old Lingard found her under a heap of dead and dying pirates, and had her carried on the poop of the *Flash* before the Malay craft was set on fire and sent adrift. She was conscious and in the great peace and stillness of the tropical evening succeeding the turmoil of the battle, she watched all she held dear on earth after her own savage manner, drift away into the gloom in a great roar of flame and smoke. She lay there unheeding the careful hands attending to her wound, silent and absorbed in gazing at the funeral pile of those brave men she had so much admired and so well helped in their contest with the redoubtable "Rajah Laut."

The light night breeze fanned the brig gently to the southwards, and the great blaze of light got smaller and smaller till it twinkled only on the horizon like a setting star. It set: the heavy canopy

of smoke reflected the glare of hidden flames for a short time and then disappeared also.

She realized that with this vanishing gleam her old life departed too. Thenceforth there was slavery in the far countries, amongst strangers, in unknown and perhaps terrible surroundings. There was in her the dread of the unknown; but otherwise she accepted her position calmly, after the manner of her people, and even considered it quite natural; for was she not a daughter of warriors, conquered in battle, and did she not belong rightfully to the victorious Rajah? Even the evident kindness of the terrible old man must spring, she thought, from admiration for his captive, and the flattered vanity eased for her the pangs of sorrow after such an awful calamity. Perhaps had she known of the high walls, the quiet gardens, and the silent nuns of the Samarang convent, where her destiny was leading her, she would have sought death in her dread and hate of such a restraint. But in imagination she pictured to herself the usual life of a Malay girl—the usual succession of heavy work and fierce love, of intrigues, gold ornaments, of domestic drudgery, and of that great but occult influence which is one of the few rights of half-savage womankind. But her destiny in the rough hands of the old sea-dog, acting under unreasoning impulses of the heart, took a strange and to her a terrible shape. She bore it all—the restraint and the teaching and the new faith—with calm submission, concealing her hate and contempt for all that new life. She learned the language very easily, yet understood but little of the new faith the good sisters taught her, assimilating quickly only the superstitious elements of the religion. She called Lingard father, gently and caressingly, at each of his short and noisy visits, under the clear impression that he was a great and dangerous power it was good to propitiate. Was he not now her master? And during those long four years she nourished a hope of finding favour in his eyes and ultimately becoming his wife, counsellor, and guide.

Those dreams of the future were dispelled by the Rajah Laut's "fiat," which made Almayer's fortune, as that young man fondly hoped. And dressed in the hateful finery of Europe, the young convert stood before the altar with an unknown and sulky-looking white man. For Almayer was uneasy, a little disgusted, and greatly inclined to run away. A judicious fear of the adopted father-in-law and a just regard for his own material welfare prevented him from making a scandal; yet, while swearing fidelity, he was concocting plans for getting rid of the pretty Malay girl in a more or less distant future. She, however, had retained enough of conventual teaching to understand well that according

to white men's law she was going to be Almayer's companion and not his slave, and promised to herself to act accordingly.

So when the *Flash*, freighted with materials for building a new house, left the harbour of Batavia, taking away the young couple into the unknown Borneo, she did not carry on her deck so much love and happiness as old Lingard was wont to boast before his casual friends in the verandahs of various hotels. The old seaman himself was perfectly happy. Now he had done his duty by the girl. "You know I made her an orphan," he often concluded solemnly, when talking about his own affairs to a scratch audience of shore loafers—as it was his habit to do. And the approbative shouts of his half-intoxicated auditors filled his simple soul with delight and pride. "I carry everything right through," was another of his sayings, and in pursuance of that principle he pushed the building of house and godowns on the Pantai River with feverish haste. The house for the young couple; the godowns for the big trade Almayer was going to develop while he (Lingard) would be able to give himself up to some mysterious work which was only spoken of in hints, but was understood to relate to gold and diamonds in the interior of the island. Almayer was impatient too. Had he known what was before him he might not have been so eager and full of hope as he stood watching the last canoe of the Lingard expedition disappear in the bend up the river. When, turning round, he beheld the pretty little house, the godowns built neatly by an army of Chinese carpenters, the new jetty round which were clustered the trading canoes, he felt a sudden elation in the thought that the world was his.

But the world had to be conquered first, and its conquest was not so easy as he thought. He was very soon made to understand that he was not wanted in that corner of it where old Lingard and his own weak will placed him, in the midst of unscrupulous intrigues and of a fierce trade competition. The Arabs had found out the river, had established a trading post in Sambir, and where they traded they would be masters and suffer no rival. Lingard returned unsuccessful from his first expedition, and departed again spending all the profits of the legitimate trade on his mysterious journeys. Almayer struggled with the difficulties of his position, friendless and unaided, save for the protection given to him for Lingard's sake by the old Rajah, the predecessor of Lakamba. Lakamba himself, then living as a private individual on a rice clearing, seven miles down the river, exercised all his influence towards the help of the white man's enemies, plotting against the old Rajah and Almayer with a certainty of combination, pointing clearly to a profound knowledge of their most secret affairs. Outwardly friendly, his portly form was often to

be seen on Almayer's verandah; his green turban and gold-embroidered jacket shone in the front rank of the decorous throng of Malays coming to greet Lingard on his returns from the interior; his salaams were of the lowest, and his hand-shakings of the heartiest, when welcoming the old trader. But his small eyes took in the signs of the times, and he departed from those interviews with a satisfied and furtive smile to hold long consultations with his friend and ally, Syed Abdulla, the chief of the Arab trading post, a man of great wealth and of great influence in the islands.

It was currently believed at that time in the settlement that Lakamba's visits to Almayer's house were not limited to those official interviews. Often on moonlight nights the belated fishermen of Sambir saw a small canoe shooting out from the narrow creek at the back of the white man's house, and the solitary occupant paddle cautiously down the river in the deep shadows of the bank; and those events, duly reported, were discussed round the evening fires far into the night with the cynicism of expression common to Malays. Almayer went on struggling desperately, but with a feebleness of purpose depriving him of all chance of success against men so unscrupulous and resolute as his rivals the Arabs. The trade fell away from the large godowns, and the godowns themselves rotted piecemeal. The old man's banker, Hudig of Macassar, failed, and with this went the whole available capital. The profits of past years had been swallowed up in Lingard's exploring craze. Lingard was in the interior—perhaps dead—at all events giving no sign of life. Almayer stood alone in the midst of those adverse circumstances, deriving only a little comfort from the companionship of his little daughter, born two years after the marriage, and at the time some six years old. His wife had soon commenced to treat him with a savage contempt expressed by sulky silence, only occasionally varied by outbursts of savage invective. He felt she hated him, and saw her jealous eyes watching himself and the child with almost an expression of hate. She was jealous of the little girl's evident preference for the father, and Almayer felt he was not safe with that woman in the house. While she was burning the furniture, and tearing down the pretty curtains in her unreasoning hate of those signs of civilization, Almayer, cowed by these outbursts of savage nature, meditated in silence on the best way of getting rid of her. He thought of everything; even planned murder in an undecided and feeble sort of way, but dared do nothing—expecting every day the return of Lingard with news of some immense good fortune. Lingard returned indeed, but aged, ill, a ghost of his former self, with the fire of fever burning in his sunken eyes, almost the only survivor of the numerous expedition.

But he was successful at last! Untold riches were in his grasp; he wanted more money—only a little more to realize a dream of fabulous fortune. And Hudig had failed! Almayer scraped all he could together, but the old man wanted more. If Almayer could not get it he would go to Singapore—to Europe even, but before all to Singapore; and he would take the little Nina with him. The child must be brought up decently. He had good friends in Singapore who would take care of her and have her taught properly. All would be well, and that girl, upon whom the old seaman seemed to have transferred all his former affection for the mother, would be the richest woman in the East—in the world even. So old Lingard shouted, pacing the verandah with his heavy quarter-deck step, gesticulating with a smouldering cheroot; ragged, dishevelled, enthusiastic; and Almayer, sitting huddled up on a pile of mats, thought with dread of the separation with the only human being he loved—with greater dread still, perhaps, of the scene with his wife, the savage tigress deprived of her young. She will poison me, thought the poor wretch, well aware of that easy and final manner of solving the social, political, or family problems in Malay life.

To his great surprise she took the news very quietly, giving only him and Lingard a furtive glance, and saying not a word. This, however, did not prevent her the next day from jumping into the river and swimming after the boat in which Lingard was carrying away the nurse with the screaming child. Almayer had to give chase with his whale-boat and drag her in by the hair in the midst of cries and curses enough to make heaven fall. Yet after two days spent in wailing, she returned to her former mode of life, chewing betel-nut, and sitting all day amongst her women in stupefied idleness. She aged very rapidly after that, and only roused herself from her apathy to acknowledge by a scathing remark or an insulting exclamation the accidental presence of her husband. He had built for her a riverside hut in the compound where she dwelt in perfect seclusion. Lakamba's visits had ceased when, by a convenient decree of Providence the old ruler of Sambir departed this life. Lakamba reigned in his stead now, having been well served by his Arab friends with the Dutch authorities. Syed Abdulla was the great man and trader of the Pantai. Almayer lay ruined and helpless under the close-meshed net of their intrigues, owing his life only to his supposed knowledge of Lingard's valuable secret. Lingard had disappeared. He wrote once from Singapore saying the child was well, and under the care of a Mrs. Vinck, and that he himself was going to Europe to raise money for the great enterprise. He was coming back soon. There would be no difficulties, he wrote. People would rush in

with their money. Evidently they did not, for there was only one letter more from him saying he was ill, had found no relation living, but little else besides. Then came a complete silence. Europe had swallowed up the Rajah Laut apparently, and Almayer looked vainly westward for a ray of light out of the gloom of his shattered hopes. Years passed, and the rare letters from Mrs. Vinck, later from the girl herself, were the only thing to be looked to to make life bearable amongst the triumphant savagery of the river. Almayer lived now alone, having even ceased to visit his debtors who would not pay, sure of Lakamba's protection. The faithful Sumatrese Ali cooked his rice and made his coffee, for he dared not trust any one else, and least of all his wife. He killed time wandering sadly in the overgrown paths round the house, visiting the ruined godowns where a few brass guns covered with verdigris and only a few broken cases of mouldering Manchester goods reminded him of the good early times when all this was full of life and merchandise, and he overlooked a busy scene on the river bank, his little daughter by his side. Now the up-country canoes glided past the little rotten wharf of Lingard and Co., to paddle up the Pantai branch, and cluster round the new jetty belonging to Abdulla. Not that they loved Abdulla, but they dared not trade with the man whose star had set. Had they done so they knew there was no mercy to be expected from Arab or Rajah; no rice to be got on credit in times of scarcity from either; and Almayer could not help them, having at times hardly enough for himself. Almayer, in his isolation and despair, often envied his near neighbour the Chinaman, Jim-Eng, whom he could see stretched on a pile of cool mats, a wooden pillow under his head, an opium pipe in his nerveless fingers. He did not seek, however, consolation in opium—perhaps it was too expensive—perhaps his white man's pride saved him from that degradation; but most likely it was the thought of his little daughter in the far-off Straits Settlements. He heard from her oftener since Abdulla bought a steamer, which ran now between Singapore and the Pantai settlement every three months or so. Almayer felt himself nearer his daughter. He longed to see her, and planned a voyage to Singapore, but put off his departure from year to year, always expecting some favourable turn of fortune. He did not want to meet her with empty hands and with no words of hope on his lips. He could not take her back into that savage life to which he was condemned himself. He was also a little afraid of her. What would she think of him? He reckoned the years. A grown woman. A civilized woman, young and hopeful; while he felt old and hopeless, and very much like those savages round him. He asked

himself what was going to be her future. He could not answer that question yet, and he dared not face her. And yet he longed after her. He hesitated for years.

His hesitation was put an end to by Nina's unexpected appearance in Sambir. She arrived in the steamer under the captain's care. Almayer beheld her with surprise not unmixed with wonder. During those ten years the child had changed into a woman, black-haired, olive-skinned, tall, and beautiful, with great sad eyes, where the startled expression common to Malay womankind was modified by a thoughtful tinge inherited from her European ancestry. Almayer thought with dismay of the meeting of his wife and daughter, of what this grave girl in European clothes would think of her betel-nut chewing mother, squatting in a dark hut, disorderly, half naked, and sulky. He also feared an outbreak of temper on the part of that pest of a woman he had hitherto managed to keep tolerably quiet, thereby saving the remnants of his dilapidated furniture. And he stood there before the closed door of the hut in the blazing sunshine listening to the murmur of voices, wondering what went on inside, wherefrom all the servant-maids had been expelled at the beginning of the interview, and now stood clustered by the palings with half-covered faces in a chatter of curious speculation. He forgot himself there trying to catch a stray word through the bamboo walls till the captain of the steamer (who had walked up with the girl) fearing a sunstroke, took him under the arm and led him into the shade of his own verandah where Nina's trunk stood already, having been landed by the steamer's men. As soon as Captain Ford had his glass before him and his cheroot lighted, Almayer asked for the explanation of his daughter's unexpected arrival. Ford said little beyond generalizing in vague but violent terms upon the foolishness of women in general, and of Mrs. Vinck in particular.

"You know, Kaspar," said he, in conclusion, to the excited Almayer, "it is deucedly awkward to have a half-caste girl in the house. There's such a lot of fools about. There was that young fellow from the bank who used to ride to the Vinck bungalow early and late. That old woman thought it was for that Emma of hers. When she found out what he wanted exactly, there was a row, I can tell you. She would not have Nina—not an hour longer—in the house. Fact is, I heard of this affair and took the girl to my wife. My wife is a pretty good woman—as women go—and upon my word we would have kept the girl for you, only she would not stay. Now, then! Don't flare up, Kaspar. Sit still. What can you do? It is better so. Let her stay with you. She was never happy over there. Those two Vinck girls are no

better than dressed-up monkeys. They slighted her. You can't make her white. It's no use you swearing at me. You can't. She is a good girl for all that, but she would not tell my wife anything. If you want to know, ask her yourself; but if I was you I would leave her alone. You are welcome to her passage money, old fellow, if you are short now." And the skipper, throwing away his cigar, walked off to "wake them up on board," as he expressed it.

Almayer vainly expected to hear of the cause of his daughter's return from his daughter's lips. Not that day, not on any other day did she ever allude to her Singapore life. He did not care to ask, awed by the calm impassiveness of her face, by those solemn eyes looking past him on the great, still forests sleeping in majestic repose to the murmur of the broad river. He accepted the situation, happy in the gentle and protecting affection the girl showed him, fitfully enough, for she had (as he called it) her bad days when she used to visit her mother and remain long hours in the riverside hut, coming out as inscrutable as ever, but with a contemptuous look and a short word ready to answer any of his speeches. He got used even to that, and on those days kept quiet, although greatly alarmed by his wife's influence upon the girl. Otherwise Nina adapted herself wonderfully to the circumstances of a half-savage and miserable life. She accepted without question or apparent disgust the neglect, the decay, the poverty of the household, the absence of furniture, and the preponderance of rice diet on the family table. She lived with Almayer in the little house (now sadly decaying) built originally by Lingard for the young couple. The Malays discussed eagerly her arrival. There were at the beginning crowded levées of Malay women with their children, seeking eagerly after "Ubat" for all the ills of the flesh from the young Mem Putih. In the cool of the evening grave Arabs in long white shirts and yellow sleeveless jackets walked slowly on the dusty path by the riverside towards Almayer's gate, and made solemn calls upon that Unbeliever under shallow pretences of business, only to get a glimpse of the young girl in a highly decorous manner. Even Lakamba came out of his stockade in a great pomp of war canoes and red umbrellas, and landed on the rotten little jetty of Lingard and Co. He came, he said, to buy a couple of brass guns as a present to his friend the chief of Sambir Dyaks; and while Almayer, suspicious but polite, busied himself in unearthing the old popguns in the godowns, the Rajah sat on an armchair in the verandah, surrounded by his respectful retinue waiting in vain for Nina's appearance. She was in one of her bad days, and remained in her mother's hut watching with her the ceremonious proceedings on the verandah. The Rajah

departed, baffled but courteous, and soon Almayer began to reap the benefits of improved relations with the ruler in the shape of the recovery of some debts, paid to him with many apologies and many a low salaam by debtors till then considered hopelessly insolvent. Under these improving circumstances Almayer brightened up a little. All was not lost perhaps. Those Arabs and Malays saw at last that he was a man of some ability, he thought. And he began, after his manner, to plan great things, to dream of great fortunes for himself and Nina. Especially for Nina! Under these vivifying impulses he asked Captain Ford to write to his friends in England making inquiries after Lingard. Was he alive or dead? If dead, had he left any papers, documents; any indications or hints as to his great enterprise? Meantime he had found amongst the rubbish in one of the empty rooms a notebook belonging to the old adventurer. He studied the crabbed handwriting of its pages and often grew meditative over it. Other things also woke him up from his apathy. The stir made in the whole of the island by the establishment of the British Borneo Company affected even the sluggish flow of the Pantai life. Great changes were expected; annexation was talked of; the Arabs grew civil. Almayer began building his new house for the use of the future engineers, agents, or settlers of the new Company. He spent every available guilder on it with a confiding heart. One thing only disturbed his happiness; his wife came out of her seclusion, importing her green jacket, scant sarongs, shrill voice, and witch-like appearance, into his quiet life in the small bungalow. And his daughter seemed to accept that savage intrusion into their daily existence with wonderful equanimity. He did not like it, but dared say nothing.

3

THE deliberations conducted in London have a far-reaching importance, and so the decision issued from the fog-veiled offices of the Borneo Company darkened for Almayer the brilliant sunshine of the Tropics, and added another drop of bitterness to the cup of his disenchantments. The claim to that part of the East Coast was abandoned, leaving the Pantai river under the nominal power of Holland. In Sambir there was joy and excitement. The slaves were hurried out of sight into the forest and jungle, and the flags were run up to tall poles in the Rajah's compound in expectation of a visit from Dutch man-of-war boats.

The frigate remained anchored outside the mouth of the river,

and the boats came up in tow of the steam launch, threading their way cautiously amongst a crowd of canoes filled with gaily dressed Malays. The officer in command listened gravely to the loyal speeches of Lakamba, returned the salaams of Abdulla, and assured those gentlemen in choice Malay of the great Rajahs down in Batavia—friendship and good-will towards the ruler and inhabitants of this model state of Sambir.

Almayer from his verandah watched across the river the festive proceedings, heard the report of brass guns saluting the new flag presented to Lakamba, and the deep murmur of the crowd of spectators surging round the stockade. The smoke of the firing rose in white clouds on the green background of the forests, and he could not help comparing his own fleeting hopes to the rapidly disappearing vapour. He was by no means patriotically elated by the event, yet he had to force himself into a gracious behaviour when, the official reception being over, the naval officers of the Commission crossed the river to pay a visit to the solitary white man of whom they had heard, no doubt wishing also to catch a glimpse of his daughter. In that they were disappointed, Nina refusing to show herself; but they seemed easily consoled by the gin and cheroots set before them by the hospitable Almayer; and sprawling comfortably on the lame armchairs under the shade of the verandah, while the blazing sunshine outside seemed to set the great river simmering in the heat, they filled the little bungalow with the unusual sounds of European languages, with noise and laughter produced by naval witticisms at the expense of the fat Lakamba whom they had been complimenting so much that very morning. The younger men in access of good fellowship made their host talk, and Almayer, excited by the sight of European faces, by the sound of European voices, opened his heart before the sympathizing strangers, unaware of the amusement the recital of his many misfortunes caused to those future admirals. They drank his health, wished him many big diamonds and a mountain of gold, expressed even an envy of the high destinies awaiting him yet. Encouraged by so much friendliness, the grey-headed and foolish dreamer invited his guests to visit his new house. They went there through the long grass in a straggling procession while their boats were got ready for the return down the river in the cool of the evening. And in the great empty rooms where the tepid wind entering through the sashless windows whirled gently the dried leaves and the dust of many days of neglect, Almayer in his white jacket and flowered sarong, surrounded by a circle of glittering uniforms, stamped his foot to show the solidity of the neatly-fitting floor, and expatiated upon the beauties and convenience of the buildings

They listened and assented, amazed by the wonderful simplicity and the foolish hopefulness of the man, till Almayer, carried away by his excitement, disclosed his regret at the non-arrival of the English, "who knew how to develop a rich country," as he expressed it. There was a general laugh amongst the Dutch officers at that unsophisticated statement, and a move was made towards the boats; but when Almayer, stepping cautiously on the rotten boards of the Lingard jetty, tried to approach the chief of the Commission with some timid hints anent the protection required by the Dutch subjects against the wily Arabs, that salt water diplomat told him significantly that the Arabs were better subjects than Hollanders who dealt illegally in gunpowder with the Malays. The innocent Almayer recognized there at once the oily tongue of Abdulla and the solemn persuasiveness of Lakamba, but ere he had time to frame an indignant protest the steam launch and the string of boats moved rapidly down the river leaving him on the jetty, standing open-mouthed in his surprise and anger. There are thirty miles of river from Sambir to the gem-like islands of the estuary where the frigate was awaiting the return of the boats. The moon rose long before the boats had traversed half that distance, and the black forest sleeping peacefully under her cold rays woke up that night to the ringing laughter in the small flotilla provoked by some reminiscence of Almayer's lamentable narrative. Salt-water jests at the poor man's expense were passed from boat to boat, the non-appearance of his daughter was commented upon with severe displeasure, and the half-finished house built for the reception of Englishmen received on that joyous night the name of "Almayer's Folly" by the unanimous vote of the lighthearted seamen.

For many weeks after this visit life in Sambir resumed its even and uneventful flow. Each day's sun shooting its morning rays above the tree-tops lit up the usual scene of daily activity. Nina walking on the path that formed the only street in the settlement saw the accustomed sight of men lolling on the shady side of the houses, on the high platforms; of women busily engaged in husking the daily rice; of naked brown children racing along the shady and narrow paths leading to the clearings. Jim-Eng, strolling before his house, greeted her with a friendly nod before climbing up indoors to seek his beloved opium pipe. The elder children clustered round her, daring from long acquaintance, pulling the skirts of her white robe with their dark fingers, and showing their brilliant teeth in expectation of a shower of glass beads. She greeted them with a quiet smile, but always had a few friendly words for a Siamese girl, a slave owned by Bulangi, whose numerous wives were said to be of a violent temper. Well-

founded rumour said also that the domestic squabbles of that industrious cultivator ended generally in a combined assault of all his wives upon the Siamese slave. The girl herself never complained—perhaps from dictates of prudence, but more likely through the strange, resigned apathy of half-savage womankind. From early morning she was to be seen on the paths amongst the houses—by the riverside or on the jetties, the tray of pastry, it was her mission to sell, skilfully balanced on her head. During the great heat of the day she usually sought refuge in Almayer's campong, often finding shelter in a shady corner of the verandah, where she squatted with her tray before her, when invited by Nina. For "Mem Putih" she had always a smile, but the presence of Mrs. Almayer, the very sound of her shrill voice, was the signal for a hurried departure.

To this girl Nina often spoke; the other inhabitants of Sambir seldom or never heard the sound of her voice. They got used to the silent figure moving in their midst calm and white-robed, a being from another world and incomprehensible to them. Yet Nina's life for all her outward composure, for all the seeming detachment from the things and people surrounding her, was far from quiet, in consequence of Mrs. Almayer being much too active for the happiness and even safety of the household. She had resumed some intercourse with Lakamba, not personally, it is true (for the dignity of that potentate kept him inside his stockade), but through the agency of that potentate's prime minister, harbour master, financial adviser, and general factotum. That gentleman—of Sulu origin—was certainly endowed with statesmanlike qualities, although he was totally devoid of personal charms. In truth he was perfectly repulsive, possessing only one eye and a pock-marked face, with nose and lips horribly disfigured by the smallpox. This unengaging individual often strolled into Almayer's garden in unofficial costume, composed of a piece of pink calico round his waist. There at the back of the house, squatting on his heels on scattered embers, in close proximity to the great iron boiler, where the family daily rice was being cooked by the women under Mrs. Almayer's superintendence, did that astute negotiator carry on long conversations in Sulu language with Almayer's wife. What the subject of their discourses was might have been guessed from the subsequent domestic scenes by Almayer's hearthstone.

Of late Almayer had taken to excursions up the river. In a small canoe with two paddlers and the faithful Ali for a steersman he would disappear for a few days at a time. All his movements were no doubt closely watched by Lakamba and Abdulla, for the man once in the confidence of Rajah Laut was supposed to

be in possession of valuable secrets. The coast population of Borneo believes implicitly in diamonds of fabulous value, in gold mines of enormous richness in the interior. And all those imaginings are heightened by the difficulty of penetrating far inland, especially on the northeast coast, where the Malay and the river tribes of Dyaks or Head-hunters are eternally quarrelling. It is true enough that some gold reaches the coast in the hands of those Dyaks when, during short periods of truce in the desultory warfare, they visit the coast settlements of Malays. And so the wildest exaggerations are built up and added to on the slight basis of that fact.

Almayer in his quality of white man—as Lingard before him—had somewhat better relations with the up-river tribes. Yet even his excursions were not without danger, and his returns were eagerly looked for by the impatient Lakamba. But every time the Rajah was disappointed. Vain were the conferences by the rice-pot of his factotum Babalatchi with the white man's wife. The white man himself was impenetrable—impenetrable to persuasion, coaxing, abuse; to soft words and shrill revilings; to desperate beseechings or murderous threats; for Mrs. Almayer, in her extreme desire to persuade her husband into an alliance with Lakamba, played upon the whole gamut of passion. With her soiled robe wound tightly under the armpits across her lean bosom, her scant greyish hair tumbled in disorder over her projecting cheek-bones, in suppliant attitude, she depicted with shrill volubility the advantages of close union with a man so good and so fair dealing.

“Why don't you go to the Rajah?” she screamed. “Why do you go back to those Dyaks in the great forest? They should be killed. You cannot kill them, you cannot; but our Rajah's men are brave! You tell the Rajah where the old white man's treasure is. Our Rajah is good! He is our very grandfather. He will kill those wretched Dyaks, and you shall have half the treasure. Oh, Kaspar, tell where the treasure is! Tell me! Tell me out of the old man's surat where you read so often at night.”

On those occasions Almayer sat with rounded shoulders bending to the blast of this domestic tempest, accentuating only each pause in the torrent of his wife's eloquence by an angry growl, “There is no treasure! Go away, woman!” Exasperated by the sight of his patiently bent back, she would at last walk round so as to face him across the table, and clasping her robe with one hand she stretched the other lean arm and claw-like hand to emphasize, in a passion of anger and contempt, the rapid rush of scathing remarks and bitter cursings heaped on the head of the man unworthy to associate with brave Malay chiefs. It ended

generally by Almayer rising slowly, his long pipe in hand, his face set into a look of inward pain, and walking away in silence. He descended the steps and plunged into the long grass on his way to the solitude of his new house, dragging his feet in a state of physical collapse from disgust and fear before that fury. She followed to the head of the steps, and sent the shafts of indiscriminate abuse after the retreating form. And each of those scenes was concluded by a piercing shriek, reaching him far away. "You know, Kaspar, I am your wife! your own Christian wife after your own Blanda law!" For she knew that this was the bitterest thing of all; the greatest regret of that man's life.

All these scenes Nina witnessed unmoved. She might have been deaf, dumb, without any feeling as far as any expression of opinion went. Yet oft when her father had sought the refuge of the great dusty rooms of "Almayer's Folly," and her mother, exhausted by rhetorical efforts, squatted wearily on her heels with her back against the leg of the table, Nina would approach her curiously, guarding her skirts from betel juice besprinkling the floor, and gaze down upon her as one might look into the quiescent crater of a volcano after a destructive eruption. Mrs. Almayer's thoughts after these scenes were usually turned into a channel of childhood reminiscences, and she gave them utterance in a kind of monotonous recitative—slightly disconnected, but generally describing the glories of the Sultan of Sulu, his great splendour, his power, his great prowess, the fear which benumbed the hearts of white men at the sight of his swift piratical praus. And these muttered statements of her grandfather's might were mixed up with bits of later recollections, where the great fight with the "White Devil's" brig and the convent life in Samarang occupied the principal place. At that point she usually dropped the thread of her narrative, and pulling out the little brass cross, always suspended round her neck, she contemplated it with superstitious awe. That superstitious feeling connected with some vague talismanic properties of the little bit of metal and the still more hazy but terrible notion of some bad Djinns and horrible torments invented, as she thought, for her especial punishment by the good Mother Superior in case of the loss of the above charm, were Mrs. Almayer's only theological outfit for the stormy road of life. Mrs. Almayer had at least something tangible to cling to, but Nina, brought up under the Protestant wing of the proper Mrs. Vinck, had not even a little piece of brass to remind her of past teaching. And listening to the recital of those savage glories, those barbarous fights and savage feasting, to the story of deeds valorous, albeit somewhat bloodthirsty, where men of her mother's race shone far above the Orang Blanda, she felt herself irresistibly.

fascinated, and saw with vague surprise the narrow mantle of civilized morality, in which good-meaning people had wrapped her young soul, fall away and leave her shivering and helpless as if on the edge of some deep and unknown abyss. Strangest of all, this abyss did not frighten her when she was under the influence of the witch-like being she called her mother. She seemed to have forgotten in civilized surroundings her life before the time when Lingard had, so to speak, kidnapped her from Brow. Since then she had had Christian teaching, social education, and a good glimpse of civilized life. Unfortunately her teachers did not understand her nature, and the education ended in a scene of humiliation, in an outburst of contempt from white people for her mixed blood. And now she had lived on the river for three years with a savage mother and a father walking about amongst pitfalls, with his head in the clouds, weak, irresolute, and unhappy. She had lived a life devoid of all the decencies of civilization, in miserable domestic conditions; she had breathed the atmosphere of sordid plottings for gain, of the no less disgusting intrigues and crimes for lust or money; and those things, together with the domestic quarrels, were the only event of her three years' existence. She did not die from despair and disgust the first month, as she expected and almost hoped for. On the contrary, at the end of half a year it had seemed to her that she had known no other life. Her young mind having been unskilfully permitted to glance at better things, and then thrown back again into the hopeless quagmire of barbarism, full of strong and uncontrolled passions, had lost the power to discriminate. It seemed to Nina that there was no change and no difference. Whether they traded in brick godowns or on the muddy river bank; whether they reached after much or little; whether they made love under the shadows of the great trees or in the shadow of the cathedral on the Singapore promenade; whether they plotted for their own ends under the protection of laws and according to the rules of Christian conduct, or whether they sought the gratification of their desires with the savage cunning and the unrestrained fierceness of natures as innocent of culture as their own immense and gloomy forests, Nina saw only the same manifestations of love and hate and of sordid greed chasing the uncertain dollar in all its multifarious and vanishing shapes. To her resolute nature, however, after all these years, the savage and uncompromising sincerity of purpose shown by her Malay kinsmen seemed at last preferable to the sleek hypocrisy, to the polite disguises, to the virtuous pretences of such white people as she had had the misfortune to come in contact with. After all it was her life; it was going to be her life, and so thinking she fell more and more under the influence of her

mother. Seeking, in her ignorance, a better side to that life, she listened with avidity to the old woman's tales of the departed glories of the Rajahs, from whose race she had sprung, and she became gradually more indifferent, more contemptuous of the white side of her descent represented by a feeble and traditionless father.

Almayer's difficulties were by no means diminished by the girl's presence in Sambir. The stir caused by her arrival had died out, it is true, and Lakamba had not renewed his visits; but about a year after the departure of the man-of-war boats the nephew of Abdulla, Syed Reshid, returned from his pilgrimage to Mecca, rejoicing in a green jacket and the proud title of Hadji. There was a great letting off of rockets on board the steamer which brought him in, and a great beating of drums all night in Abdulla's compound, while the feast of welcome was prolonged far into the small hours of the morning. Reshid was the favourite nephew and heir of Abdulla, and that loving uncle, meeting Almayer one day by the riverside, stopped politely to exchange civilities and to ask solemnly for an interview. Almayer suspected some attempt at a swindle, or at any rate something unpleasant, but of course consented with a great show of rejoicing. Accordingly the next evening, after sunset, Abdulla came, accompanied by several other grey-beards and by his nephew. That young man—of a very rakish and dissipated appearance—affected the greatest indifference as to the whole of the proceedings. When the torch-bearers had grouped themselves below the steps, the visitors had seated themselves on various lame chairs, Reshid stood apart in the shadow, examining his aristocratically small hands with great attention. Almayer, surprised by the great solemnity of his visitors, perched himself on the corner of the table with a characteristic want of dignity quickly noted by the Arabs with grave disapproval. But Abdulla spoke now, looking straight past Almayer at the red curtain hanging in the doorway, where a slight tremor disclosed the presence of women on the other side. He began by neatly complimenting Almayer upon the long years they had dwelt together in cordial neighbourhood, and called upon Allah to give him many more years to gladden the eyes of his friends by his welcome presence. He made a polite allusion to the great consideration shown him (Almayer) by the Dutch "Commissie," and drew thence the flattering inference of Almayer's great importance amongst his own people. He—Abdulla—was also important amongst all the Arabs, and his nephew Reshid would be heir of that social position and of great riches. Now Reshid was a Hadji. He was possessor of several Malay women, went on Abdulla, but it was time he had a favourite

wife, the first of the four allowed by the Prophet. And, speaking with well-bred politeness, he explained further to the dumb-founded Almayer that, if he would consent to the alliance of his offspring with that true believer and virtuous man Reshid, she would be mistress of all the splendours of Reshid's house, the first wife of the first Arab in the Islands, when he—Abdulla—had been called to the joys of Paradise by Allah the All-merciful. "You know, Tuan," he said, in conclusion, "the other women would be her slaves, and Reshid's house is great. From Bombay he has brought great divans, and costly carpets, and European furniture. There is also a great looking-glass in a frame shining like gold. What could a girl want more?" And while Almayer looked upon him in silent dismay Abdulla spoke in a more confidential tone, waving his attendants away, and finished his speech by pointing out the material advantages of such an alliance, and offering to settle upon Almayer three thousand dollars as a sign of his sincere friendship and the price of the girl.

Poor Almayer was nearly having a fit. Burning with the desire of taking Abdulla by the throat, he had but to think of his helpless position in the midst of lawless men to comprehend the necessity of diplomatic conciliation. He mastered his impulses, and spoke politely and coldly, saying the girl was young and was the apple of his eye. Tuan Reshid, a Faithful and a Hadji, would not want an infidel woman in his harem; and, seeing Abdulla smile sceptically at that last objection, he remained silent, not trusting himself to speak more, not daring to refuse point-blank, nor yet to say anything compromising. Abdulla understood the meaning of that silence, and rose to take leave with a grave salaam. He wished his friend Almayer "a thousand years," and moved down the steps, helped dutifully by Reshid. The torch-bearers shook their torches, scattering a shower of sparks into the river, and the cortege moved off, leaving Almayer agitated but greatly relieved by their departure. He dropped into a chair and watched the glimmer of the lights amongst the tree trunks till they disappeared and complete silence succeeded the tramp of feet and the murmur of voices. He did not move till the curtain rustled and Nina came out on the verandah and sat in the rocking-chair, where she used to spend many hours every day. She gave a slight rocking motion to her seat, leaning back with half-closed eyes, her long hair shading her face from the smoky light of the lamp on the table. Almayer looked at her furtively, but the face was as impassible as ever. She turned her head slightly towards her father, and, speaking, to his great surprise, in English, asked—

"Was that Abdulla here?"

"Yes," said Almayer—"just gone."

"And what did he want, father?"

"He wanted to buy you for Reshid," answered Almayer, brutally his anger getting the better of him, and looking at the girl as if in expectation of some outbreak of feeling. But Nina remained apparently unmoved, gazing dreamily into the black night outside.

"Be careful, Nina," said Almayer, after a short silence and rising from his chair, "when you go paddling alone into the creeks in your canoe. That Reshid is a violent scoundrel, and there is no saying what he may do. Do you hear me?"

She was standing now, ready to go in, one hand grasping the curtain in the doorway. She turned round, throwing her heavy tresses back by a sudden gesture.

"Do you think he would dare?" she asked, quickly, and then turned again to go in, adding in a lower tone, "He would not dare. Arabs are all cowards."

Almayer looked after her, astonished. He did not seek the repose of his hammock. He walked the floor absently, sometimes stopping by the balustrade to think. The lamp went out. The first streak of dawn broke over the forest; Almayer shivered in the damp air. "I give it up," he muttered to himself, lying down wearily. "Damn those women! Well! If the girl did not look as if she wanted to be kidnapped!"

And he felt a nameless fear creep into his heart, making him shiver again.

4

THAT year, towards the breaking up of the southwest monsoon, disquieting rumours reached Sambir. Captain Ford, coming up to Almayer's house for an evening's chat, brought late numbers of the *Straits Times* giving the news of Acheen war and of the unsuccessful Dutch expedition. The Nakhodas of the rare trading praus ascending the river paid visits to Lakamba, discussing with that potentate the unsettled state of affairs, and wagged their heads gravely over the recital of Orang Blanda exaction, severity, and general tyranny, as exemplified in the total stoppage of gunpowder trade and the rigorous visiting of all suspicious craft trading in the straits of Macassar. Even the loyal soul of Lakamba was stirred into a state of inward discontent by the withdrawal of his license for powder and by the abrupt confiscation of one hundred and fifty barrels of that commodity by the gunboat *Princess Amelia*, when, after a hazardous voyage,

it had almost reached the mouth of the river. The unpleasant news was given him by Reshid, who, after the unsuccessful issue of his matrimonial projects, had made a long voyage amongst the islands for trading purposes; had bought the powder for his friend, and was overhauled and deprived of it on his return when actually congratulating himself on his acuteness in avoiding detection. Reshid's wrath was principally directed against Almayer, whom he suspected of having notified the Dutch authorities of the desultory warfare carried on by the Arabs and the Rajah with the up-river Dyak tribes.

To Reshid's great surprise the Rajah received his complaints very coldly, and showed no signs of vengeful disposition towards the white man. In truth, Lakamba knew very well that Almayer was perfectly innocent of any meddling in state affairs; and besides, his attitude towards that much persecuted individual was wholly changed in consequence of a reconciliation effected between him and his old enemy by Almayer's newly-found friend, Dain Maroola.

Almayer had now a friend. Shortly after Reshid's departure on his commercial journey, Nina, drifting slowly with the tide in the canoe on her return home after one of her solitary excursions, heard in one of the small creeks a splashing of heavy ropes dropping in the water and the prolonged song of Malay seamen when some heavy pulling is to be done. Through the thick fringe of bushes hiding the mouth of the creek she saw the tall spars of some European-rigged sailing vessel overtopping the summits of the nipa palms. A brig was being hauled out of the small creek into the main stream. The sun had set, and during the short moments of twilight Nina saw the brig, aided by the evening breeze and the flowing tide, head towards Sambir under her set foresail. The girl turned her canoe out of the main river into one of the many narrow channels amongst the wooded islets, and paddled vigorously over the black and sleepy backwaters towards Sambir. Her canoe brushed the water-palms, skirted the short spaces of muddy bank where sedate alligators looked at her with lazy unconcern, and, just as darkness was setting in, shot out into the broad junction of the two main branches of the river, where the brig was already at anchor with sails furled, yards squared, and decks seemingly untenanted by any human being. Nina had to cross the river and pass pretty close to the brig in order to reach home on the low promontory between the two branches of the Pantai. Up both branches, in the houses built on the banks and over the water, the lights twinkled already, reflected in the still waters below. The hum of voices, the occasional cry of a child, the rapid and abruptly interrupted roll of a wooden drum,

together with some distant hailing in the darkness by the returning fishermen, reached her over the broad expanse of the river. She hesitated a little before crossing, the sight of such an unusual object as an European-rigged vessel causing her some uneasiness, but the river in its wide expansion was dark enough to render a small canoe invisible. She urged her small craft with swift strokes of her paddle, kneeling in the bottom and bending forward to catch any suspicious sound while she steered towards the little jetty of Lingard and Co., to which the strong light of the paraffin lamp shining on the whitewashed verandah of Almayer's bungalow served as a convenient guide. The jetty itself, under the shadow of the bank overgrown by drooping bushes, was hidden in darkness. Before even she could see it she heard the hollow bumping of a large boat against its rotten posts, and heard also the murmur of whispered conversation in that boat whose white paint and great dimensions, faintly visible on nearer approach, made her rightly guess that it belonged to the brig just anchored. Stopping her course by a rapid motion of her paddle, with another swift stroke she sent it whirling away from the wharf and steered for a little rivulet which gave access to the back courtyard of the house. She landed at the muddy head of the creek and made her way towards the house over the trodden grass of the courtyard. To the left, from the cooking shed, shone a red glare through the banana plantation she skirted, and the noise of feminine laughter reached her from there in the silent evening. She rightly judged her mother was not near, laughter and Mrs. Almayer not being close neighbours. She must be in the house, thought Nina, as she ran lightly up the inclined plane of shaky planks leading to the back door of the narrow passage dividing the house in two. Outside the doorway, in the black shadow, stood the faithful Ali.

"Who is there?" asked Nina.

"A great Malay man has come," answered Ali, in a tone of suppressed excitement. "He is a rich man. There are six men with lances. Real Soldat, you understand. And his dress is very brave. I have seen his dress. It shines! What jewels! Don't go there, Mem Nina. Tuan said not; but the old Mem is gone. Tuan will be angry. Merciful Allah! what jewels that man has got!"

Nina slipped past the outstretched hand of the slave into the dark passage where, in the crimson glow of the hanging curtain, close by its other end, she could see a small dark form crouching near the wall. Her mother was feasting her eyes and ears with what was taking place on the front verandah, and Nina approached to take her share in the rare pleasure of some novelty.

She was met by her mother's extended arm and by a low murmured warning not to make a noise.

"Have you seen them, mother?" asked Nina, in a breathless whisper.

Mrs. Almayer turned her face towards the girl, and her sunken eyes shone strangely in the red half-light of the passage.

"I saw him," she said, in an almost inaudible tone, pressing her daughter's hand with her bony fingers. "A great Rajah has come to Sambir—a Son of Heaven," muttered the old woman to herself. "Go away, girl!"

The two women stood close to the curtain, Nina wishing to approach the rent in the stuff, and her mother defending the position with angry obstinacy. On the other side there was a lull in the conversation, but the occasional light tinkling of some ornaments, the clink of metal scabbards, or of brass siri-vessels passed from hand to hand, was audible during the short pause. The women struggled silently, when there was a shuffling noise and the shadow of Almayer's burly form fell on the curtain.

The women ceased struggling and remained motionless. Almayer had stood up to answer his guest, turning his back to the doorway, unaware of what was going on, on the other side. He spoke in a tone of regretful irritation.

"You have come to the wrong house, Tuan Maroola, if you want to trade as you say. I was a trader once, not now, whatever you may have heard about me in Macassar. And if you want anything, you will not find it here; I have nothing to give, and want nothing myself. You should go to the Rajah here; you can see in the daytime his houses across the river, there, where those fires are burning on the shore. He will help you and trade with you. Or, better still, go to the Arabs over there," he went on bitterly, pointing with his hand towards the houses of Sambir. "Abdulla is the man you want. There is nothing he would not buy, and there is nothing he would not sell; believe me, I know him well."

He waited for an answer a short time, then added—

"All that I have said is true, and there is nothing more."

Nina, held back by her mother, heard a soft voice reply with a calm evenness of intonation peculiar to the better class Malays—

"Who would doubt a white Tuan's words? A man seeks his friends where his heart tells him. Is this not true also? I have come, although so late, for I have something to say which you may be glad to hear. To-morrow I shall go to the Sultan; a trader wants the friendship of great men. Then I shall return here to speak serious words, if Tuan permits. I shall not go to the Arabs; their lies are very great! What are they? Chelakka!"

Almayer's voice sounded a little more pleasantly in reply.

"Well, as you like. I can hear you to-morrow at any time if you have anything to say. Bah! After you have seen the Sultan Lakamba you will not want to return here, Inchi Dain. You will see. Only mind, I will have nothing to do with Lakamba. You may tell him so. What is your business with me, after all?"

"To-morrow we talk, Tuan, now I know you," answered the Malay. "I speak English a little, so we can talk and nobody will understand, and then——"

He interrupted himself suddenly, asking surprised. "What's that noise, Tuan?"

Almayer had also heard the increasing noise of the scuffle recommenced on the women's side of the curtain. Evidently Nina's strong curiosity was on the point of overcoming Mrs. Almayer's exalted sense of social proprieties. Hard breathing was distinctly audible, and the curtain shook during the contest, which was mainly physical, although Mrs. Almayer's voice was heard in angry remonstrance with its usual want of strictly logical reasoning, but with the well-known richness of invective.

"You shameless woman! Are you a slave?" shouted shrilly the irate matron. "Veil your face, abandoned wretch! You white snake, I will not let you!"

Almayer's face expressed annoyance and also doubt as to the advisability of interfering between mother and daughter. He glanced at his Malay visitor, who was waiting silently for the end of the uproar in an attitude of amused expectation, and waving his hand contemptuously he murmured—

"It is nothing. Some women."

The Malay nodded his head gravely, and his face assumed an expression of serene indifference, as etiquette demanded after such an explanation. The contest was ended behind the curtain, and evidently the younger will had its way, for the rapid shuffle and click of Mrs. Almayer's high-heeled sandals died away in the distance. The tranquillized master of the house was going to resume the conversation when, struck by an unexpected change in the expression of his guest's countenance, he turned his head and saw Nina standing in the doorway.

After Mrs. Almayer's retreat from the field of battle, Nina, with a contemptuous exclamation, "It's only a trader," had lifted the conquered curtain and now stood in full light, framed in the dark background of the passage, her lips slightly parted, her hair in disorder after the exertion, the angry gleam not yet faded out of her glorious and sparkling eyes. She took in at a glance the group of white-clad lancemen standing motionless in the shadow of the far-off end of the verandah, and her gaze rested

curiously on the chief of that imposing cortege. He stood, almost facing her, a little on one side, and struck by the beauty of the unexpected apparition had bent low, elevating his joint hands above his head in a sign of respect accorded by Malays only to the great of this earth. The crude light of the lamp shone on the gold embroidery of his black silk jacket, broke in a thousand sparkling rays on the jewelled hilt of his kriss protruding from under the many folds of the red sarong gathered into a sash round his waist, and played on the precious stones of the many rings on his dark fingers. He straightened himself up quickly after the low bow, putting his hand with a graceful ease on the hilt of his heavy short sword ornamented with brilliantly dyed fringes of horse hair. Nina, hesitating on the threshold, saw an erect lithe figure of medium height with a breadth of shoulder suggesting great power. Under the folds of a blue turban, whose fringed ends hung gracefully over the left shoulder, was a face full of determination and expressing a reckless good-humour, not devoid, however, of some dignity. The squareness of lower jaw, the full red lips, the mobile nostrils, and the proud carriage of the head gave the impression of a being half-savage, untamed, perhaps cruel, and corrected the liquid softness of the almost feminine eye, that general characteristic of the race. Now, the first surprise over, Nina saw those eyes fixed upon her with such an uncontrolled expression of admiration and desire that she felt a hitherto unknown feeling of shyness, mixed with alarm and some delight, enter and penetrate her whole being. Confused by those unusual sensations she stopped in the doorway and instinctively drew the lower part of the curtain across her face, leaving only half a rounded cheek, a stray tress, and one eye exposed, wherewith to contemplate the gorgeous and bold being so unlike in appearance to the rare specimens of traders she had seen before on that same verandah.

Dain Maroola, dazzled by the unexpected vision, forgot the confused Almayer, forgot his brig, his escort staring in open-mouthed admiration, the object of his visit and all things else, in his overpowering desire to prolong the contemplation of so much loveliness met so suddenly in such an unlikely place—as he thought.

“It is my daughter,” said Almayer, in an embarrassed manner. “It is of no consequence. White women have their customs, as you say. However, it is late; we will finish our talk to-morrow.”

Dain bent low trying to convey in a last glance towards the girl the bold expression of his overwhelming admiration. The next minute he was shaking Almayer's hand with grave courtesy, his face wearing a look of stolid unconcern as to any feminine

presence. His men filed off, and he followed them quickly, closely attended by a thick-set, savage-looking Sumatrese he had introduced before as the commander of his brig. Nina walked to the balustrade of the verandah and saw the sheen of moonlight on the steel spear-heads and heard the rhythmic jingle of brass anklets as the men moved in single file towards the jetty. The boat shoved off after a little while, looming large in the full light of the moon, a black shapeless mass in the slight haze hanging over the water. Nina fancied she could distinguish the graceful figure of the trader standing erect in the stern sheets, but in a little while all the outlines got blurred, confused, and soon disappeared in the folds of white vapour shrouding the middle of the river.

Almayer had approached his daughter, and leaning with both arms over the rail, was looking moodily down on the heap of rubbish at the foot of the verandah.

"What was all that noise just now?" he growled peevishly, without looking up. "Confound you and your mother! What did she want? What did you come out for?"

"She did not want to let me come out," said Nina. "She is angry. She says the man just gone is some Rajah. I think she is right now."

"I believe all you women are crazy," snarled Almayer. "What's that to you, to her, to anybody? The man wants to collect trepang and birds' nests on the islands. He told me so, that Rajah of yours. He will come to-morrow. I want you both to keep away from the house, and let me attend to my business in peace."

Dain Maroola came the next day and had a long conversation with Almayer. This was the beginning of a close and friendly intercourse which, at first, was much remarked in Sambir, till the population got used to the frequent sight of many fires burning in Almayer's campong, where Maroola's men were warming themselves during the cold nights of the northwest monsoon, while their master had long conferences with the Tuan Putih—as they styled Almayer amongst themselves. Great was the curiosity in Sambir on the subject of the new trader. Had he seen the Sultan? What did the Sultan say? Had he given any presents? What would he sell? What would he buy? Those were the questions broached eagerly by the inhabitants of bamboo houses built over the river. Even in more substantial buildings, in Abdulla's house, in the residences of principal traders, Arab, Chinese, and Bugis, the excitement ran high, and lasted many days. With inborn suspicion they would not believe the simple account of himself the young trader was always ready to give.

Yet it had all the appearance of truth. He said he was a trader, and sold rice. He did not want to buy gutta-percha or beeswax, because he intended to employ his numerous crew in collecting trepang on the coral reefs outside the river, and also in seeking for birds' nests on the mainland. Those two articles he professed himself ready to buy if there were any to be obtained in that way. He said he was from Bali and a Brahmin, which last statement he made good by refusing all food during his often repeated visits to Lakamba's and Almayer's houses. To Lakamba he went generally at night and had long audiences. Babalatchi, who was always a third party at those meetings of potentate and trader, knew how to resist all attempts on the part of the curious to ascertain the subject of so many long talks. When questioned with languid courtesy by the grave Abdulla he sought refuge in a vacant stare of his one eye, and in the affectation of extreme simplicity.

"I am only my master's slave," murmured Babalatchi, in a hesitating manner. Then as if making up his mind suddenly for a reckless confidence he would inform Abdulla of some transaction in rice, repeating the words, "A hundred big bags the Sultan bought; a hundred, Tuan!" in a tone of mysterious solemnity. Abdulla, firmly persuaded of the existence of some more important dealings, received, however, the information with all the signs of respectful astonishment. And the two would separate, the Arab cursing inwardly the wily dog, while Babalatchi went on his way walking on the dusty path, his body swaying, his chin with its few grey hairs pushed forward, resembling an inquisitive goat bent on some unlawful expedition. Attentive eyes watched his movements. Jim-Eng, descrying Babalatchi far away, would shake off the stupor of an habitual opium smoker and, tottering on to the middle of the road, would await the approach of that important person, ready with hospitable invitation. But Babalatchi's discretion was proof even against the combined assaults of good fellowship and of strong gin generously administered by the open-hearted Chinaman. Jim-Eng, owning himself beaten, was left uninformed with the empty bottle, and gazed sadly after the departing form of the statesman of Sambir pursuing his devious and unsteady way, which, as usual, led him to Almayer's compound. Ever since a reconciliation had been effected by Dain Maroola between his white friend and the Rajah, the one-eyed diplomatist had again become a frequent guest in the Dutchman's house. To Almayer's great disgust he was to be seen there at all times, strolling about in an abstracted kind of way on the verandah, skulking in the passages, or else popping round unexpected corners, always willing to engage Mrs. Almayer in

confidential conversation. He was very shy of the master himself, as if suspicious that the pent-up feelings of the white man towards his person might find vent in a sudden kick. But the cooking shed was his favourite place, and he became an habitual guest there, squatting for hours amongst the busy women, with his chin resting on his knees, his lean arms clasped round his legs, and his one eye roving uneasily—the very picture of watchful ugliness. Almayer wanted more than once to complain to Lakamba of his Prime Minister's intrusion, but Dain dissuaded him. "We cannot say a word here that he does not hear," growled Almayer.

"Then come and talk on board the brig," retorted Dain, with a quiet smile. "It is good to let the man come here. Lakamba thinks he knows much. Perhaps the Sultan thinks I want to run away. Better let the one-eyed crocodile sun himself in your campong, Tuan."

And Almayer assented unwillingly muttering vague threats of personal violence, while he eyed malevolently the aged statesman sitting with quiet obstinacy by his domestic rice-pot.

5

AT LAST the excitement had died out in Sambir. The inhabitants got used to the sight of comings and goings between Almayer's house and the vessel, now moored to the opposite bank, and speculation as to the feverish activity displayed by Almayer's boatmen in repairing old canoes ceased to interfere with the due discharge of domestic duties by the women of the Settlement. Even the baffled Jim-Eng left off troubling his muddled brain with secrets of trade, and relapsed by the aid of his opium pipe into a state of stupefied bliss, letting Babalatchi pursue his way past his house uninvited and seemingly unnoticed.

So on that warm afternoon, when the deserted river sparkled under the vertical sun, the statesman of Sambir could, without any hindrance from friendly inquirers, shove off his little canoe from under the bushes, where it was usually hidden during his visits to Almayer's compound. Slowly and languidly Babalatchi paddled, crouching low in the boat, making himself small under his enormous sun hat to escape the scorching heat reflected from the water. He was not in a hurry; his master, Lakamba, was surely reposing at this time of the day. He would have ample time to cross over and greet him on his waking with important news. Will he be displeased? Will he strike his ebony wood staff angrily on the floor, frightening him by the incoherent violence

of his exclamations; or will he squat down with a good-humoured smile, and, rubbing his hands gently over his stomach with a familiar gesture, expectorate copiously into the brass siri-vessel, giving vent to a low, approbative murmur? Such were Babalatchi's thoughts as he skilfully handled his paddle, crossing the river on his way to the Rajah's campong, whose stockades showed from behind the dense foliage of the bank just opposite to Almayer's bungalow.

Indeed, he had a report to make. Something certain at last to confirm the daily tale of suspicions, the daily hints of familiarity, of stolen glances he had seen, of short and burning words he had overheard exchanged between Dain Maroola and Almayer's daughter. Lakamba had, till then, listened to it all, calmly and with evident distrust; now he was going to be convinced, for Babalatchi had the proof; had it this very morning, when fishing at break of day in the creek over which stood Bulangi's house. There from his skiff he saw Nina's long canoe drift past, the girl sitting in the stern bending over Dain, who was stretched in the bottom with his head resting on the girl's knees. He saw it. He followed them, but in a short time they took to the paddles and got away from under his observant eye. A few minutes afterwards he saw Bulangi's slave-girl paddling in a small dug-out to the town with her cakes for sale. She also had seen them in the grey dawn. And Babalatchi grinned confidentially to himself at the recollection of the slave-girl's discomposed face, of the hard look in her eyes, of the tremble in her voice, when answering his questions. That little Taminah evidently admired Dain Maroola. That was good! And Babalatchi laughed aloud at the notion; then becoming suddenly serious, he began by some strange association of ideas to speculate upon the price for which Bulangi would, possibly, sell the girl. He shook his head sadly at the thought that Bulangi was a hard man, and had refused one hundred dollars for that same Taminah only a few weeks ago; then he became suddenly aware that the canoe had drifted too far down during his meditation. He shook off the despondency caused by the certitude of Bulangi's mercenary disposition, and, taking up his paddle, in a few strokes sheered alongside the water-gate of the Rajah's house.

That afternoon Almayer, as was his wont lately, moved about on the water-side, overlooking the repairs to his boats. He had decided at last. Guided by the scraps of information contained in old Lingard's pocket-book, he was going to seek for the rich goldmine, for that place where he had only to stoop to gather up an immense fortune and realize the dream of his young days. To obtain the necessary help he had shared his knowledge with

Dain Maroola, he had consented to be reconciled with Lakamba, who gave his support to the enterprise on condition of sharing the profits; he had sacrificed his pride, his honour, and his loyalty in the face of the enormous risk of his undertaking, dazzled by the greatness of the results to be achieved by this alliance so distasteful yet so necessary. The dangers were great, but Maroola was brave; his men seemed as reckless as their chief, and with Lakamba's aid success seemed assured.

For the last fortnight Almayer was absorbed in the preparations, walking amongst his workmen and slaves in a kind of waking trance, where practical details as to the fitting out of the boats were mixed up with vivid dreams of untold wealth, where the present misery of burning sun, of the muddy and malodorous river bank disappeared in a gorgeous vision of a splendid future existence for himself and Nina. He hardly saw Nina during these last days, although the beloved daughter was ever present in his thoughts. He hardly took notice of Dain, whose constant presence in his house had become a matter of course to him now they were connected by a community of interests. When meeting the young chief he gave him an absent greeting and passed on, seemingly wishing to avoid him, bent upon forgetting the hated reality of the present by absorbing himself in his work, or else by letting his imagination soar far above the tree-tops into the great white clouds away to the westward, where the paradise of Europe was awaiting the future Eastern millionaire. And Maroola, now the bargain was struck and there was no more business to be talked over, evidently did not care for the white man's company. Yet Dain was always about the house, but he seldom stayed long by the riverside. On his daily visits to the white man the Malay chief preferred to make his way quietly through the central passage of the house, and would come out into the garden at the back, where the fire was burning in the cooking shed, with the rice kettle swinging over it, under the watchful supervision of Mrs. Almayer. Avoiding that shed, with its black smoke and the warbling of soft, feminine voices, Dain would turn to the left. There, on the edge of a banana plantation, a clump of palms and mango trees formed a shady spot, a few scattered bushes giving it a certain seclusion into which only the serving women's chatter or an occasional burst of laughter could penetrate. Once in, he was invisible; and hidden there, leaning against the smooth trunk of a tall palm, he waited with gleaming eyes and an assured smile to hear the faint rustle of dried grass under the light footsteps of Nina.

From the very first moment when his eyes beheld this—to him—perfection of loveliness he felt in his inmost heart the conviction

that she would be his; he felt the subtle breath of mutual understanding passing between their two savage natures, and he did not want Mrs. Almayer's encouraging smiles to take every opportunity of approaching the girl; and every time he spoke to her, every time he looked into her eyes, Nina, although averting her face, felt as if this bold-looking being who spoke burning words into her willing ear was the embodiment of her fate, the creature of her dreams—reckless, ferocious, ready with flashing kris for his enemies, and with passionate embrace for his beloved—the ideal Malay chief of her mother's tradition.

She recognized with a thrill of delicious fear the mysterious consciousness of her identity with that being. Listening to his words, it seemed to her she was born only then to a knowledge of a new existence, that her life was complete only when near him and she abandoned herself to a feeling of dreamy happiness, while with half-veiled face and in silence—as became a Malay girl—she listened to Dain's words giving up to her the whole treasure of love and passion his nature was capable of with all the unrestrained enthusiasm of a man totally untrammelled by any influence of civilized self-discipline.

And they used to pass many a delicious and fast fleeting hour under the mango trees behind the friendly curtain of bushes till Mrs. Almayer's shrill voice gave the signal of unwilling separation. Mrs. Almayer had undertaken the easy task of watching her husband lest he should interrupt the smooth course of her daughter's love affair, in which she took a great and benignant interest. She was happy and proud to see Dain's infatuation, believing him to be a great and powerful chief, and she found also gratification of her mercenary instincts in Dain's open-handed generosity.

On the eve of the day when Babalatchi's suspicions were confirmed by ocular demonstration, Dain and Nina had remained longer than usual in their shady retreat. Only Almayer's heavy step on the verandah and his querulous clamour for food decided Mrs. Almayer to lift a warning cry. Maroola leaped lightly over the low bamboo fence, and made his way through the banana plantation down to the muddy shore of the back creek, while Nina walked slowly towards the house to minister to her father's wants, as was her wont every evening. Almayer felt happy enough that evening; the preparations were nearly completed; to-morrow he would launch his boats. In his mind's eye he saw the rich prize in his grasp; and, with tin spoon in his hand, he was forgetting the plateful of rice before him in the fanciful arrangement of some splendid banquet to take place on his arrival in Amsterdam. Nina, reclining in the long chair, listened absently

to the few disconnected words escaping from her father's lips. Expedition! Gold! What did she care for all that? But at the name of Maroola mentioned by her father she was all attention. Dain was going down the river with his brig to-morrow to remain away for a few days, said Almayer. It was very annoying, this delay. As soon as Dain returned they would have to start without loss of time, for the river was rising. He would not be surprised if a great flood was coming. And he pushed away his plate with an impatient gesture on rising from the table. But now Nina heard him not. Dain going away! That's why he had ordered her, with that quiet masterfulness it was her delight to obey, to meet him at break of day in Bulangi's creek. Was there a paddle in her canoe? she thought. Was it ready? She would have to start early—at four in the morning, in a very few hours.

She rose from her chair, thinking she would require rest before the long pull in the early morning. The lamp was burning dimly and her father, tired with the day's labour, was already in his hammock. Nina put the lamp out and passed into a large room she shared with her mother on the left of the central passage. Entering, she saw that Mrs. Almayer had deserted the pile of mats serving her as bed in one corner of the room, and was now bending over the opened lid of her large wooden chest. Half a shell of cocoanut filled with oil, where a cotton rag floated for a wick, stood on the floor, surrounding her with a ruddy halo of light shining through the black and odorous smoke. Mrs. Almayer's back was bent, and her head and shoulders hidden in the deep box. Her hands rummaged in the interior, where a soft clink as of silver money could be heard. She did not notice at first her daughter's approach, and Nina, standing silently by her, looked down on many little canvas bags ranged in the bottom of the chest, wherefrom her mother extracted handfuls of shining guilders and Mexican dollars, letting them stream slowly back again through her claw-like fingers. The music of tinkling silver seemed to delight her, and her eyes sparkled with the reflected gleam of freshly-minted coins. She was muttering to herself: "And this, and this, and yet this! Soon he will give more—as much more as I ask. He is a great Rajah—a Son of Heaven! And she will be a Rance—he gave all this for her! Who ever gave anything for me? I am a slave! Am I? I am the mother of a great Rance!" She became aware suddenly of her daughter's presence, and ceased her droning, shutting the lid down violently; then, without rising from her crouching position, she looked up at the girl standing by with a vague smile on her dreamy face.

"You have seen. Have you?" she shouted, shrilly. "That is all mine, and for you. It is not enough! He will have to give

more before he takes you away to the southern island where his father is king. You hear me? You are worth more, granddaughter of Rajahs! More! More!"

The sleepy voice of Almayer was heard on the verandah recommending silence. Mrs. Almayer extinguished the light and crept into her corner of the room. Nina laid down on her back on a pile of soft mats, her hands entwined under her head, gazing through the shutterless hole, serving as a window at the stars twinkling on the black sky; she was awaiting the time of start for her appointed meeting-place. With quiet happiness she thought of that meeting in the great forest, far from all human eyes and sounds. Her soul, lapsing again into the savage mood, which the genius of civilization working by the hand of Mrs. Vinck could never destroy, experienced a feeling of pride and of some slight trouble at the high value her worldly-wise mother had put upon her person; but she remembered the expressive glances and words of Dain, and, tranquillized, she closed her eyes in a shiver of pleasant anticipation.

There are some situations where the barbarian and the, so-called, civilized man meet upon the same ground. It may be supposed that Dain Maroola was not exceptionally delighted with his prospective mother-in-law, nor that he actually approved of that worthy woman's appetite for shining dollars. Yet on that foggy morning when Babalatchi, laying aside the cares of state, went to visit his fish-baskets in the Bulangi creek, Maroola had no misgivings, experienced no feelings but those of impatience and longing, when paddling to the east side of the island forming the backwater in question. He hid his canoe in the bushes and strode rapidly across the islet, pushing with impatience through the twigs of heavy undergrowth intercrossed over his path. From motives of prudence he would not take his canoe to the meeting-place, as Nina had done. He had left it in the main stream till his return from the other side of the island. The heavy warm fog was closing rapidly round him, but he managed to catch a fleeting glimpse of a light away to the left, proceeding from Bulangi's house. Then he could see nothing in the thickening vapour, and kept to the path only by a sort of instinct, which also led him to the very point on the opposite shore he wished to reach. A great log had stranded there, at right angles to the bank, forming a kind of jetty against which the swiftly flowing stream broke with a loud ripple. He stepped on it with a quick but steady motion, and in two strides found himself at the outer end, with the rush and swirl of the foaming water at his feet.

Standing there alone, as if separated from the world; the heavens, earth; the very water roaring under him swallowed up

in the thick veil of the morning fog, he breathed out the name of Nina before him into the apparently limitless space, sure of being heard, instinctively sure of the nearness of the delightful creature; certain of her being aware of his near presence as he was aware of hers.

The bow of Nina's canoe loomed up close to the log, canted high out of the water by the weight of the sitter in the stern. Maroola laid his hand on the stem and leaped lightly in, giving it a vigorous shove off. The light craft, obeying the new impulse, cleared the log by a hair's breadth, and the river, with obedient complicity, swung it broadside to the current, and bore it off silently and rapidly between the invisible banks. And once more Dain, at the feet of Nina, forgot the world, felt himself carried away helpless by a great wave of supreme emotion, by a rush of joy, pride, and desire; understood once more with overpowering certitude that there was no life possible without that being he held clasped in his arms with passionate strength in a prolonged embrace.

Nina disengaged herself gently with a low laugh.

"You will overturn the boat, Dain," she whispered.

He looked into her eyes eagerly for a minute and let her go with a sigh, then lying down in the canoe he put his head on her knees, gazing upwards and stretching his arms backwards till his hands met round the girl's waist. She bent over him, and, shaking her head, framed both their faces in the falling locks of her long black hair.

And so they drifted on, he speaking with all the rude eloquence of a savage nature giving itself up without restraint to an overmastering passion, she bending low to catch the murmur of words sweeter to her than life itself. To those two nothing existed then outside the gunwales of the narrow and fragile craft. It was their world, filled with their intense and all-absorbing love. They took no heed of thickening mist, or of the breeze dying away before sunrise; they forgot the existence of the great forests surrounding them, of all the tropical nature awaiting the advent of the sun in a solemn and impressive silence.

Over the low river-mist hiding the boat with its freight of young passionate life and all-forgetting happiness, the stars paled, and a silvery-grey tint crept over the sky from the eastward. There was not a breath of wind, not a rustle of stirring leaf, not a splash of leaping fish to disturb the serene repose of all living things on the banks of the great river. Earth, river, and sky were wrapped up in a deep sleep from which it seemed there would be no waking. All the seething life and movement of tropical nature seemed concentrated in the ardent eyes, in the tumultu-

ously beating hearts of the two beings drifting in the canoe, under the white canopy of mist, over the smooth surface of the river.

Suddenly a great sheaf of yellow rays shot upwards from behind the black curtain of trees lining the banks of the Pantai. The stars went out; the little black clouds at the zenith glowed for a moment with crimson tints, and the thick mist, stirred by the gentle breeze, the sigh of waking nature, whirled round and broke into fantastically torn pieces, disclosing the wrinkled surface of the river sparkling in the broad light of day. Great flocks of white birds wheeled screaming above the swaying tree-tops. The sun had risen on the east coast.

Dain was the first to return to the cares of everyday life. He rose and glanced rapidly up and down the river. His eye detected Babalatchi's boat astern, and another small black speck on the glittering water, which was Taminah's canoe. He moved cautiously forward, and, kneeling, took up a paddle; Nina at the stern took hers. They bent their bodies to the work, throwing up the water at every stroke, and the small craft went swiftly ahead, leaving a narrow wake fringed with a lacelike border of white and gleaming foam. Without turning his head, Dain spoke.

"Somebody behind us, Nina. We must not let him gain. I think he is too far to recognize us."

"Somebody before us also," panted out Nina, without ceasing to paddle.

"I think I know," rejoined Dain. "The sun shines over there, but I fancy it is the girl Taminah. She comes down every morning to my brig to sell cakes—stays often all day. It does not matter; steer more into the bank; we must get under the bushes. My canoe is hidden not far from here."

As he spoke his eyes watched the broad-leaved nipas which they were brushing in their swift and silent course.

"Look out, Nina," he said at last; "there, where the water palms end and the twigs hang down under the leaning tree. Steer for the big green branch."

He stood up attentive, and the boat drifted slowly in shore, Nina guiding it by a gentle and skilful movement of her paddle. When near enough Dain laid hold of the big branch, and leaning back shot the canoe under a low green archway of thickly matted creepers giving access to a miniature bay formed by the caving in of the bank during the last great flood. His own boat was there anchored by a stone, and he stepped into it, keeping his hand on the gunwale of Nina's canoe. In a moment the two little nutshells with their occupants floated quietly side by side, reflected by the black water in the dim light struggling through a high canopy of dense foliage; while above, away up in the broad day, flamed

immense red blossoms sending down on their heads a shower of great dew-sparkling petals that descended rotating slowly in a continuous and perfumed stream; and over them, under them, in the sleeping water; all around them in a ring of luxuriant vegetation bathed in the warm air charged with strong and harsh perfumes, the intense work of tropical nature went on: plants shooting upward, entwined, interlaced in inextricable confusion, climbing madly and brutally over each other in the terrible silence of a desperate struggle towards the life-giving sunshine above—as if struck with sudden horror at the seething mass of corruption below, at the death and decay from which they sprang.

"We must part now," said Dain, after a long silence. "You must return at once, Nina. I will wait till the brig drifts down here, and shall get on board then."

"And will you be long away, Dain?" asked Nina, in a low voice.

"Long!" exclaimed Dain. "Would a man willingly remain long in a dark place? When I am not near you, Nina, I am like a man that is blind. What is life to me without light?"

Nina leaned over, and with a proud and happy smile took Dain's face between her hands, looking into his eyes with a fond yet questioning gaze. Apparently she found there the confirmation of the words just said, for a feeling of grateful security lightened for her the weight of sorrow at the hour of parting. She believed that he, the descendant of many great Rajahs, the son of a great chief, the master of life and death, knew the sunshine of life only in her presence. An immense wave of gratitude and love welled forth out of her heart towards him. How could she make an outward and visible sign of all she felt for the man who had filled her heart with so much joy and so much pride? And in the great tumult of passion, like a flash of lightning came to her the reminiscence of that despised and almost forgotten civilization she had only glanced at in her days of restraint, of sorrow, and of anger. In the cold ashes of that hateful and miserable past she would find the sign of love, the fitting expression of the boundless felicity of the present, the pledge of a bright and splendid future. She threw her arms around Dain's neck and pressed her lips to his in a long and burning kiss. He closed his eyes, surprised and frightened at the storm raised in his breast by the strange and to him hitherto unknown contact, and long after Nina had pushed her canoe into the river he remained motionless, without daring to open his eyes, afraid to lose the sensation of intoxicating delight he had tasted for the first time.

Now he wanted but immortality, he thought, to be the equal

of gods, and the creature that could open so the gates of paradise must be his—soon would be his for ever!

He opened his eyes in time to see through the archway of creepers the bows of his brig come slowly into view, as the vessel drifted past on its way down the river. He must go on board now, he thought; yet he was loth to leave the place where he had learned to know what happiness meant. "Time yet. Let them go," he muttered to himself; and he closed his eyes again under the red shower of scented petals, trying to recall the scene with all its delight and all its fear.

He must have been able to join his brig in time, after all, and found much occupation outside, for it was in vain that Almayer looked for his friend's speedy return. The lower reach of the river where he so often and so impatiently directed his eyes remained deserted, save for the rapid flitting of some fishing canoe; but down the upper reaches came black clouds and heavy showers heralding the final setting in of the rainy season with its thunderstorms and great floods making the river almost impossible of ascent for native canoes.

Almayer, strolling along the muddy beach between his houses, watched uneasily the river rising inch by inch, creeping slowly nearer to the boats, now ready and hauled up in a row under the cover of dripping Kajang-mats. Fortune seemed to elude his grasp, and in his weary tramp backwards and forwards under the steady rain falling from the lowering sky, a sort of despairing indifference took possession of him. What did it matter? It was just his luck! Those two infernal savages, Lakamba and Dain, induced him, with their promises of help, to spend his last dollar in the fitting out of boats, and now one of them was gone somewhere, and the other shut up in his stockade would give no sign of life. No, not even the scoundrelly Babalatchi, thought Almayer, would show his face near him, now they had sold him all the rice, brass gongs, and cloth necessary for his expedition. They had his very last coin, and did not care whether he went or stayed. And with a gesture of abandoned discouragement Almayer would climb up slowly to the verandah of his new house to get out of the rain, and leaning on the front rail with his head sunk between his shoulders he would abandon himself to the current of bitter thoughts, oblivious of the flight of time and the pangs of hunger, deaf to the shrill cries of his wife calling him to the evening meal. When, roused from his sad meditations by the first roll of the evening thunderstorm, he stumbled slowly towards the glimmering light of his old house, his half-dead hope made his ears preternaturally acute to any sound on the river. Several nights in succession he had heard the splash of paddles and had seen the

indistinct form of a boat, but when hailing the shadowy apparition, his heart bounding with sudden hope of hearing Dain's voice, he was disappointed each time by the sulky answer conveying to him the intelligence that the Arabs were on the river, bound on a visit to the home-staying Lakamba. This caused him many sleepless nights, spent in speculating upon the kind of villainy those estimable personages were hatching now. At last, when all hope seemed dead, he was overjoyed on hearing Dain's voice; but Dain also appeared very anxious to see Lakamba, and Almayer felt uneasy owing to a deep and ineradicable distrust as to that ruler's disposition towards himself. Still, Dain had returned at last. Evidently he meant to keep to his bargain. Hope revived, and that night Almayer slept soundly, while Nina watched the angry river under the lash of the thunderstorm sweeping onward towards the sea.

6

DAIN was not long in crossing the river after leaving Almayer. He landed at the water-gate of the stockade enclosing the group of houses which composed the residence of the Rajah of Sambir. Evidently somebody was expected there, for the gate was open, and men with torches were ready to precede the visitor up the inclined plane of planks leading to the largest house where Lakamba actually resided, and where all the business of state was invariably transacted. The other buildings within the enclosure served only to accommodate the numerous household and the wives of the ruler.

Lakamba's own house was a strong structure of solid planks, raised on high piles, with a verandah of split bamboos surrounding it on all sides; the whole was covered in by an immensely high-pitched roof of palm-leaves, resting on beams blackened by the smoke of many torches.

The building stood parallel to the river, one of its long sides facing the water-gate of the stockade. There was a door in the short side looking up the river, and the inclined plank-way led straight from the gate to that door. By the uncertain light of smoky torches, Dain noticed the vague outlines of a group of armed men in the dark shadows to his right. From that group Babalatchi stepped forward to open the door, and Dain entered the audience chamber of the Rajah's residence. About one-third of the house was curtained off, by heavy stuff of European manufacture, for that purpose; close to the curtain there was a big

arm-chair of some black wood, much carved, and before it a rough deal table. Otherwise the room was only furnished with mats in great profusion. To the left of the entrance stood a rude arm-rack, with three rifles with fixed bayonets in it. By the wall, in the shadow, the body-guard of Lakamba—all friends or relations—slept in a confused heap of brown arms, legs, and multi-coloured garments, from whence issued an occasional snore or a subdued groan of some uneasy sleeper. An European lamp with a green shade standing on the table made all this indistinctly visible to Dain.

"You are welcome to your rest here," said Babalatchi, looking at Dain interrogatively.

"I must speak to the Rajah at once," answered Dain.

Babalatchi made a gesture of assent, and, turning to the brass gong suspended under the arm-rack, struck two sharp blows.

The ear-splitting din woke up the guard. The snores ceased; outstretched legs were drawn in; the whole heap moved, and slowly resolved itself into individual forms with much yawning and rubbing of sleepy eyes; behind the curtains there was a burst of feminine chatter; then the bass voice of Lakamba was heard.

"Is that the Arab trader?"

"No, Tuan," answered Babalatchi; "Dain has returned at last. He is here for an important talk, bitcharra—if you mercifully consent."

Evidently Lakamba's mercy went so far—for in a short while he came out from behind the curtain—but it did not go to the length of inducing him to make an extensive toilet. A short red sarong tightened hastily round his hips was his only garment. The merciful ruler of Sambir looked sleepy and rather sulky. He sat in the arm-chair, his knees well apart, his elbows on the arm-rests, his chin on his breast, breathing heavily and waiting malevolently for Dain to open the important talk.

But Dain did not seem anxious to begin. He directed his gaze towards Babalatchi, squatting comfortably at the feet of his master, and remained silent with a slightly bent head as if in attentive expectation of coming words of wisdom.

Babalatchi coughed discreetly, and, leaning forward, pushed over a few mats for Dain to sit upon, then lifting up his squeaky voice he assured him with eager volubility of everybody's delight at this long-looked-for return. His heart had hungered for the sight of Dain's face, and his ears were withering for the want of the refreshing sound of his voice. Everybody's hearts and ears were in the same sad predicament, according to Babalatchi, as he indicated with a sweeping gesture the other bank of the river

where the settlement slumbered peacefully, unconscious of the great joy awaiting it on the morrow when Dain's presence amongst them would be disclosed. "For"—went on Babalatchi—"what is the joy of a poor man if not the open hand of a generous trader or of a great——"

Here he checked himself abruptly with a calculated embarrassment of manner, and his roving eye sought the floor, while an apologetic smile dwelt for a moment on his misshapen lips. Once or twice during this opening speech an amused expression flitted across Dain's face, soon to give way, however, to an appearance of grave concern. On Lakamba's brow a heavy frown had settled, and his lips moved angrily as he listened to his Prime Minister's oratory. In the silence that fell upon the room when Babalatchi ceased speaking arose a chorus of varied snores from the corner where the body-guard had resumed their interrupted slumbers, but the distant rumble of thunder filling then Nina's heart with apprehension for the safety of her lover passed unheeded by those three men intent each on their own purposes, for life or death.

After a short silence, Babalatchi, discarding now the flowers of polite eloquence, spoke again, but in short and hurried sentences and in a low voice. They had been very uneasy. Why did Dain remain so long absent? The men dwelling on the lower reaches of the river heard the reports of big guns and saw a fire-ship of the Dutch amongst the islands of the estuary. So they were anxious. Rumours of a disaster had reached Abdulla a few days ago, and since then they had been waiting for Dain's return under the apprehension of some misfortune. For days they had closed their eyes in fear, and woke up alarmed, and walked abroad trembling, like men before an enemy. And all on account of Dain. Would he not allay their fears for his safety, not for themselves? They were quiet and faithful, and devoted to the great Rajah in Batavia—may his fate lead him ever to victory for the joy and profit of his servants! "And here," went on Babalatchi, "Lakamba my master was getting thin in his anxiety for the trader he had taken under his protection; and so was Abdulla, for what would wicked men not say if perchance——"

"Be silent, fool!" growled Lakamba, angrily.

Babalatchi subsided into silence with a satisfied smile, while Dain, who had been watching him as if fascinated, turned with a sigh of relief towards the ruler of Sambir. Lakamba did not move, and, without raising his head, looked at Dain from under his eyebrows, breathing audibly, with pouted lips, in an air of general discontent.

"Speak! O Dain!" he said at last. "We have heard many

rumours. Many nights in succession has my friend Reshid come here with bad tidings. News travels fast along the coast. But they may be untrue; there are more lies in men's mouths in these days than when I was young, but I am not easier to deceive now."

"All my words are true," said Dain, carelessly. "If you want to know what befell my brig, then learn that it is in the hands of the Dutch. Believe me, Rajah," he went on, with sudden energy, "the Orang Blanda have good friends in Sambir, or else how did they know I was coming thence?"

Lakamba gave Dain a short and hostile glance. Babalatchi rose quietly, and, going to the arm-rack, struck the gong violently.

Outside the door there was a shuffle of bare feet; inside, the guard woke up and sat staring in sleepy surprise.

"Yes, you faithful friend of the white Rajah," went on Dain, scornfully, turning to Babalatchi, who had returned to his place, "I have escaped, and I am here to gladden your heart. When I saw the Dutch ship I ran the brig inside the reefs and put her ashore. They did not dare to follow with the ship, so they sent the boats. We took to ours and tried to get away, but the ship dropped fireballs at us, and killed many of my men. But I am left, O Babalatchi! The Dutch are coming here. They are seeking for me. They're coming to ask their faithful friend Lakamba and his slave Babalatchi. Rejoice!"

But neither of his hearers appeared to be in a joyful mood. Lakamba had put one leg over his knee, and went on gently scratching it with a meditative air, while Babalatchi, sitting cross-legged, seemed suddenly to become smaller and very limp, staring straight before him vacantly. The guard evinced some interest in the proceedings, stretching themselves full length on the mats to be nearer the speaker. One of them got up and now stood leaning against the arm-rack, playing absently with the fringes of his sword-hilt.

Dain waited till the crash of thunder had died away in distant mutterings before he spoke again.

"Are you dumb, O ruler of Sambir, or is the son of a great Rajah unworthy of your notice? I am come here to seek refuge and to warn you, and want to know what you intend doing."

"You came here because of the white man's daughter," retorted Lakamba, quickly. "Your refuge was with your father, the Rajah of Bali, the Son of Heaven, the 'Anak Agong' himself. What am I to protect great princes? Only yesterday I planted rice in a burnt clearing; to-day you say I hold your life in my hand."

Babalatchi glanced at his master. "No man can escape his fate," he murmured piously. "When love enters a man's heart

his is like a child—without any understanding. Be merciful, Lakamba," he added, twitching the corner of the Rajah's sarong warningly.

Lakamba snatched away the skirt of the sarong angrily. Under the dawning comprehension of intolerable embarrassments caused by Dain's return to Sambir he began to lose such composure as he had been, till then, able to maintain; and now he raised his voice loudly above the whistling of the wind and the patter of rain on the roof in the hard squall passing over the house.

"You came here first as a trader with sweet words and great promises, asking me to look the other way while you worked your will on the white man there. And I did. What do you want now? When I was young I fought. Now I am old, and want peace. It is easier for me to have you killed than to fight the Dutch. It is better for me."

The squall had now passed, and, in the short stillness of the lull in the storm, Lakamba repeated softly, as if to himself, "Much easier. Much better."

Dain did not seem greatly discomposed by the Rajah's threatening words. While Lakamba was speaking he had glanced once rapidly over his shoulder, just to make sure that there was nobody behind him, and, tranquillized in that respect, he had extracted a siri-box out of the folds of his waist-cloth, and was wrapping carefully the little bit of betel-nut and a small pinch of lime in the green leaf tendered him politely by the watchful Babalatchi. He accepted this as a peace-offering from the silent statesman—a kind of mute protest against his master's undiplomatic violence, and as an omen of a possible understanding to be arrived at yet. Otherwise Dain was not uneasy. Although recognizing the justice of Lakamba's surmise that he had come back to Sambir only for the sake of the white man's daughter, yet he was not conscious of any childish lack of understanding, as suggested by Babalatchi. In fact, Dain knew very well that Lakamba was too deeply implicated in the gunpowder smuggling to care for an investigation by the Dutch authorities into that matter. When sent off by his father, the independent Rajah of Bali, at the time when the hostilities between Dutch and Malays threatened to spread from Sumatra over the whole archipelago, Dain had found all the big traders deaf to his guarded proposals, and above the temptation of the great prices he was ready to give for gunpowder. He went to Sambir as a last and almost hopeless resort, having heard in Macassar of the white man there, and of the regular steamer trading from Singapore—allured also by the fact that there was no Dutch resident on the river, which would make things easier, no doubt. His

hopes got nearly wrecked against the stubborn loyalty of Lakamba arising from well-understood self-interest; but at last the young man's generosity, his persuasive enthusiasm, the prestige of his father's great name, overpowered the prudent hesitation of the ruler of Sambir. Lakamba would have nothing to do himself with any illegal traffic. He also objected to the Arabs being made use of in that matter; but he suggested Almayer, saying that he was a weak man easily persuaded, and that his friend, the English captain of the steamer, could be made very useful—very likely even would join in the business, smuggling the powder in the steamer without Abdulla's knowledge. There again Dain met in Almayer an unexpected resistance; Lakamba had to send Babalatchi over with the solemn promise that his eyes would be shut in friendship for the white man, Dain paying for the promise and the friendship in good silver guilders of the hated Orang Blanda. Almayer, at last consenting, said the powder would be obtained, but Dain must trust him with dollars to send to Singapore in payment for it. He would induce Ford to buy and smuggle it in the steamer on board the brig. He did not want any money for himself out of the transaction, but Dain must help him in his great enterprise after sending off the brig. Almayer had explained to Dain that he could not trust Lakamba alone in that matter; he would be afraid of losing his treasure and his life through the cupidity of the Rajah; yet the Rajah had to be told, and insisted on taking a share in that operation, or else his eyes would remain shut no longer. To this Almayer had to submit. Had Dain not seen Nina he would have probably refused to engage himself and his men in the projected expedition to Gunong Mas—the mountain of gold. As it was he intended to return with half of his men as soon as the brig was clear of the reefs, but the persistent chase given him by the Dutch frigate had forced him to run south and ultimately to wreck and destroy his vessel in order to preserve his liberty or perhaps even his life. Yes, he had come back to Sambir for Nina, although aware that the Dutch would look for him there, but he had also calculated his chances of safety in Lakamba's hands. For all his ferocious talk, the merciful ruler would not kill him, for he had long ago been impressed with the notion that Dain possessed the secret of the white man's treasure; neither would he give him up to the Dutch, for fear of some fatal disclosure of complicity in the treasonable trade. So Dain felt tolerably secure as he sat meditating quietly his answer to the Rajah's blood-thirsty speech. Yes, he would point out to him the aspect of his position should he—Dain—fall into the hands of the Dutch and should he speak the truth. He would have nothing more to lose then, and he could speak the truth. And if he did

return to Sambir, disturbing thereby Lakamba's peace of mind, what then? He came to look after his property. Did he not pour a stream of silver into Mrs. Almayer's greedy lap? He had paid, for the girl, a price worthy of a great prince, although unworthy of that delightfully maddening creature for whom his untamed soul longed in an intensity of desire far more tormenting than the sharpest pain. He wanted his happiness. He had the right to be in Sambir.

He rose, and, approaching the table, leaned both his elbows on it; Lakamba responsively edged his seat a little closer, while Babalatchi scrambled to his feet and thrust his inquisitive head between his master's and Dain's. They interchanged their ideas rapidly, speaking in whispers into each other's faces, very close now, Dain suggesting, Lakamba contradicting, Babalatchi conciliating and anxious in his vivid apprehension of coming difficulties. He spoke most, whispering earnestly, turning his head slowly from side to side so as to bring his solitary eye to bear upon each of his interlocutors in turn. Why should there be strife? said he. Let Tuan Dain, whom he loved only less than his master, go trustfully into hiding. There were many places for that. Bulangi's house away in the clearing was best. Bulangi was a safe man. In the network of crooked channels no white man could find his way. White men were strong, but very foolish. It was undesirable to fight them, but deception was easy. They were like silly women—they did not know the use of reason, and he was a match for any of them—went on Babalatchi, with all the confidence of deficient experience. Probably the Dutch would seek Almayer. Maybe they would take away their countryman if they were suspicious of him. That would be good. After the Dutch went away Lakamba and Dain would get the treasure without any trouble, and there would be one person less to share it. Did he not speak wisdom? Will Tuan Dain go to Bulangi's house till the danger is over, go at once?

Dain accepted this suggestion of going into hiding with a certain sense of conferring a favour upon Lakamba and the anxious statesman, but he met the proposal of going at once with a decided no, looking Babalatchi meaningly in the eye. The statesman sighed as a man accepting the inevitable would do, and pointed silently towards the other bank of the river. Dain bent his head slowly.

"Yes, I am going there," he said.

"Before the day comes?" asked Babalatchi.

"I am going there now," answered Dain, decisively. "The Orang Blanda will not be here before to-morrow night, perhaps, and I must tell Almayer of our arrangements."

"No, Tuan. No; say nothing," protested Babalatchi. "I will go over myself at sunrise and let him know."

"I will see," said Dain, preparing to go.

The thunderstorm was recommencing outside, the heavy clouds hanging low overhead now. There was a constant rumble of distant thunder punctuated by the nearer sharp crashes, and in the continuous play of blue lightning the woods and the river showed fitfully, with all the elusive distinctness of detail characteristic of such a scene. Outside the door of the Rajah's house Dain and Babalatchi stood on the shaking verandah as if dazed and stunned by the violence of the storm. They stood there amongst the cowering forms of the Rajah's slaves and retainers seeking shelter from the rain, and Dain called aloud to his boatmen, who responded with an unanimous "Ada! Tuan!" while they looked uneasily at the river.

"This is a great flood!" shouted Babalatchi into Dain's ear. "The river is very angry. Look! Look at the drifting logs! Can you go?"

Dain glanced doubtfully on the livid expanse of seething water bounded far away on the other side by the narrow black line of the forests. Suddenly, in a vivid white flash, the low point of land with the bending trees on it and Almayer's house, leaped into view, flickered and disappeared. Dain pushed Babalatchi aside and ran down to the water-gate followed by his shivering boatmen.

Babalatchi backed slowly in and closed the door, then turned round and looked silently upon Lakamba. The Rajah sat still, glaring stonily upon the table, and Babalatchi gazed curiously at the perplexed mood of the man he had served so many years through good and evil fortune. No doubt the one-eyed statesman felt within his savage and much sophisticated breast the unwonted feelings of sympathy with, and perhaps even pity for, the man he called his master. From the safe position of a confidential adviser, he could, in the dim vista of past years, see himself—a casual cut-throat—finding shelter under that man's roof in the modest rice-clearing of early beginnings. Then came a long period of unbroken success, of wise counsels, and deep plottings resolutely carried out by the fearless Lakamba, till the whole east coast from Poulo Laut to Tanjong Batu listened to Babalatchi's wisdom speaking through the mouth of the ruler of Sambir. In those long years how many dangers escaped, how many enemies bravely faced, how many white men successfully circumvented! And now he looked upon the result of so many years of patient toil: the fearless Lakamba cowed by the shadow of an impending trouble. The ruler was growing old, and Babalatchi, aware of an uneasy

feeling at the pit of his stomach, put both his hands there with a suddenly vivid and sad perception of the fact that he himself was growing old too; that the time of reckless daring was past for both of them, and that they had to seek refuge in prudent cunning. They wanted peace; they were disposed to reform; they were ready even to retrench so as to have the wherewithal to bribe the evil days away, if bribed away they could be. Babalatchi sighed for the second time that night as he squatted again at his master's feet and tendered him his betel-nut box in mute sympathy. And they sat there in close yet silent communion of betel-nut chewers, moving their jaws slowly, expectorating decorously into the wide-mouthed brass vessel they passed to one another, and listening to the awful din of the battling elements outside.

"There is a very great flood," remarked Babalatchi, sadly.

"Yes," said Lakamba. "Did Dain go?"

"He went, Tuan. He ran down to the river like a man possessed of the Sheitan himself."

There was another long pause.

"He may get drowned," suggested Lakamba at last, with some show of interest.

"The floating logs are many," answered Babalatchi, "but he is a good swimmer," he added languidly.

"He ought to live," said Lakamba; "he knows where the treasure is."

Babalatchi assented with an ill-humoured grunt. His want of success in penetrating the white man's secret as to the locality where the gold was to be found was a sore point with the statesman of Sambir, as the only conspicuous failure in an otherwise brilliant career.

A great peace had now succeeded the turmoil of the storm. Only the little belated clouds, which hurried past overhead to catch up the main body flashing silently in the distance, sent down short showers that pattered softly with a soothing hiss over the palm-leaf roof.

Lakamba roused himself from his apathy with an appearance of having grasped the situation at last.

"Babalatchi," he called briskly, giving him a slight kick.

"Ada Tuan! I am listening."

"If the Orang Blanda come here, Babalatchi, and take Almayer to Batavia to punish him for smuggling gunpowder, what will he do, you think?"

"I do not know, Tuan."

"You are a fool," commented Lakamba, exultingly, "He will tell them where the treasure is, so as to find mercy. He will."

Babalatchi looked up at his master and nodded his head with

by no means a joyful surprise. He had not thought of this: there was a new complication.

"Almayer must die," said Lakamba, decisively, "to make our secret safe. He must die quietly, Babalatchi. You must do it." Babalatchi assented, and rose wearily to his feet. "To-morrow?" he asked.

"Yes; before the Dutch come. He drinks much coffee," answered Lakamba, with seeming irrelevancy.

Babalatchi stretched himself yawning, but Lakamba, in the flattering consciousness of a knotty problem solved by his own unaided intellectual efforts, grew suddenly very wakeful.

"Babalatchi," he said to the exhausted statesman, "fetch the box of music the white captain gave me. I cannot sleep."

At this order a deep shade of melancholy settled upon Babalatchi's features. He went reluctantly behind the curtain and soon reappeared carrying in his arms a small hand-organ, which he put down on the table with an air of deep dejection. Lakamba settled himself comfortably in his arm-chair.

"Turn, Babalatchi, turn," he murmured, with closed eyes.

Babalatchi's hand grasped the handle with the energy of despair, and as he turned, the deep gloom on his countenance changed into an expression of hopeless resignation. Through the open shutter the notes of Verdi's music floated out on the great silence over the river and forest. Lakamba listened with closed eyes and a delighted smile; Babalatchi turned, at times dozing off and swaying over, then catching himself up in a great fright with a few quick turns of the handle. Nature slept in an exhausted repose after the fierce turmoil, while under the unsteady hand of the statesman of Sambir the *Trovatore* fitfully wept, wailed, and bade good-bye to his Leonore again and again in a mournful round of tearful and endless iteration.

7

THE bright sunshine of the clear mistless morning, after the stormy night, flooded the main path of the settlement leading from the low shore of the Pantai branch of the river to the gate of Abdulla's compound. The path was deserted this morning; it stretched its dark yellow surface, hard beaten by the tramp of many bare feet, between the clusters of palm trees, whose tall trunks barred it with strong black lines at irregular intervals, while the newly risen sun threw the shadows of their leafy heads far away over the roofs of the buildings lining the

river, even over the river itself as it flowed swiftly and silently past the deserted houses. For the houses were deserted too. On the narrow strip of trodden grass intervening between their open doors and the road, the morning fires smouldered untended, sending thin fluted columns of smoke into the cool air, and spreading the thinnest veil of mysterious blue haze over the sunlit solitude of the settlement. Almayer, just out of his hammock, gazed sleepily at the unwonted appearance of Sambir, wondering vaguely at the absence of life. His own house was very quiet; he could not hear his wife's voice, nor the sound of Nina's footsteps in the big room, opening on the verandah, which he called his sitting-room, whenever, in the company of white men, he wished to assert his claims to the commonplace decencies of civilization. Nobody ever sat there; there was nothing there to sit upon, for Mrs. Almayer in her savage moods, when excited by the reminiscences of the piratical period of her life, had torn off the curtains to make sarongs for the slave-girls, and had burnt the showy furniture piecemeal to cook the family rice. But Almayer was not thinking of his furniture now. He was thinking of Dain's return, of Dain's nocturnal interview with Lakamba, of its possible influence on his long-matured plans, now nearing the period of their execution. He was also uneasy at the non-appearance of Dain who had promised him an early visit. "The fellow had plenty of time to cross the river," he mused, "and there was so much to be done to-day. The settling of details for the early start on the morrow; the launching of the boats; the thousand and one finishing touches. For the expedition must start complete, nothing should be forgotten, nothing should——"

The sense of the unwonted solitude grew upon him suddenly, and in the unusual silence he caught himself longing even for the usually unwelcome sound of his wife's voice to break the oppressive stillness which seemed, to his frightened fancy, to portend the advent of some new misfortune. "What has happened?" he muttered half aloud, as he shuffled in his imperfectly adjusted slippers towards the balustrade of the verandah. "Is everybody asleep or dead?"

The settlement was alive and very much awake. It was awake ever since the early break of day, when Mahmat Banjer, in a fit of unheard-of energy, arose and, taking up his hatchet, stepped over the sleeping forms of his two wives and walked shivering to the water's edge to make sure that the new house he was building had not floated away during the night.

The house was being built by the enterprising Mahmat on a large raft and, he had securely moored it just inside the muddy point of land at the junction of the two branches of the Pantai so

as to be out of the way of drifting logs that would no doubt strand on the point during the freshet. Mahmat walked through the wet grass saying *bourrouh*, and cursing softly to himself the hard necessities of active life that drove him from his warm couch into the cold of the morning. A glance showed him that his house was still there, and he congratulated himself on his foresight in hauling it out of harm's way, for the increasing light showed him a confused wrack of drift-logs, half-stranded on the muddy flat, interlocked into a shapeless raft by their branches, tossing to and fro and grinding together in the eddy caused by the meeting currents of the two branches of the river. Mahmat walked down to the water's edge to examine the rattan moorings of his house just as the sun cleared the trees of the forest on the opposite shore. As he bent over the fastenings he glanced again carelessly at the unquiet jumble of logs and saw there something that caused him to drop his hatchet and stand up, shading his eyes with his hand from the rays of the rising sun. It was something red, and the logs rolled over it, at times closing round it, sometimes hiding it. It looked to him at first like a strip of red cloth. The next moment Mahmat had made it out and raised a great shout.

"Ah ya! There!" yelled Mahmat. "There's a man amongst the logs." He put the palms of his hand to his lips and shouted, enunciating distinctly, his face turned towards the settlement: "There's a body of a man in the river! Come and see! A dead—stranger!"

The women of the nearest house were already outside kindling the fires and husking the morning rice. They took up the cry shrilly, and it travelled so from house to house, dying away in the distance. The men rushed out excited but silent, and ran towards the muddy point where the unconscious logs tossed and ground and bumped and rolled over the dead stranger with the stupid persistency of inanimate things. The women followed, neglecting their domestic duties and disregarding the possibilities of domestic discontent, while groups of children brought up the rear, warbling joyously, in the delight of unexpected excitement.

Almayer called aloud for his wife and daughter, but receiving no response, stood listening intently. The murmur of the crowd reached him faintly, bringing with it the assurance of some unusual event. He glanced at the river just as he was going to leave the verandah and checked himself at the sight of a small canoe crossing over from the Rajah's landing-place. The solitary occupant (in whom Almayer soon recognized Babalatchi) effected the crossing a little below the house and paddled up to the Lingard jetty in the dead water under the bank. Babalatchi clambered out slowly and went on fastening his canoe with

fastidious care, as if not in a hurry to meet Almayer, whom he saw looking at him from the verandah. This delay gave Almayer time to notice and greatly wonder at Babalatchi's official get-up. The statesman of Sambir was clad in a costume befitting his high rank. A loudly checkered sarong encircled his waist and from its many folds peeped out the silver hilt of the kriss that saw the light only on great festivals or during official receptions. Over the left shoulder and across the otherwise unclad breast of the aged diplomatist glistened a patent leather belt bearing a brass plate with the arms of Netherlands under the inscription, "Sultan of Sambir." Babalatchi's head was covered by a red turban, whose fringed ends falling over the left cheek and shoulder gave to his aged face a ludicrous expression of joyous recklessness. When the canoe was at last fastened to his satisfaction he straightened himself up, shaking down the folds of his sarong, and moved with long strides towards Almayer's house, swinging regularly his long ebony staff, whose gold head ornamented with precious stones flashed in the morning sun. Almayer waved his hand to the right towards the point of land, to him invisible, but in full view from the jetty.

"Oh, Babalatchi! oh!" he called out; "what is the matter there? can you see?"

Babalatchi stopped and gazed intently at the crowd on the river bank, and after a little while the astonished Almayer saw him leave the path, gather up his sarong in one hand, and break into a trot through the grass towards the muddy point. Almayer, now greatly interested, ran down the steps of the verandah. The murmur of men's voices and the shrill cries of women reached him quite distinctly now, and as soon as he turned the corner of his house he could see the crowd on the low promontory swaying and pushing round some object of interest. He could indistinctly hear Babalatchi's voice, then the crowd opened before the aged statesman and closed after him with an excited hum, ending in a loud shout.

As Almayer approached the throng a man ran out and rushed past him towards the settlement, unheeding his call to stop and explain the cause of this excitement. On the very outskirts of the crowd Almayer found himself arrested by an unyielding mass of humanity, regardless of his entreaties for a passage, insensible to his gentle pushes as he tried to work his way through it towards the riverside.

In the midst of his gentle and slow progress he fancied suddenly he heard his wife's voice in the thickest of the throng. He could not mistake very well Mrs. Almayer's high-pitched tones, yet the words were too indistinct for him to understand their purport.

He paused in his endeavours to make a passage for himself, intending to get some intelligence from those around him, when a long and piercing shriek rent the air, silencing the murmurs of the crowd and the voices of his informants. For a moment Almayer remained as if turned into stone with astonishment and horror, for he was certain now that he had heard his wife wailing for the dead. He remembered Nina's unusual absence, and maddened by his apprehensions as to her safety, he pushed blindly and violently forward, the crowd falling back with cries of surprise and pain before his frantic advance.

On the point of land in a little clear space lay the body of the stranger just hauled out from amongst the logs. On one side stood Babalatchi, his chin resting on the head of his staff and his one eye gazing steadily at the shapeless mass of broken limbs, torn flesh, and bloodstained rags. As Almayer burst through the ring of horrified spectators, Mrs. Almayer threw her own head-veil over the upturned face of the drowned man, and, squatting by it, with another mournful howl, sent a shiver through the now silent crowd. Mahmat dripping wet, turned to Almayer, eager to tell his tale.

In the first moment of reaction from the anguish of his fear the sunshine seemed to waver before Almayer's eyes, and he listened to words spoken around him without comprehending their meaning. When, by a strong effort of will, he regained the possession of his senses, Mahmat was saying—

"That is the way, Tuan. His sarong was caught in the broken branch, and he hung with his head under water. When I saw what it was I did not want it here. I wanted it to get clear and drift away. Why should we bury a stranger in the midst of our houses for his ghost to frighten our women and children? Have we not enough ghosts about this place?"

A murmur of approval interrupted him here. Mahmat looked reproachfully at Babalatchi.

"But the Tuan Babalatchi ordered me to drag the body ashore"—he went on looking round at his audience, but addressing himself only to Almayer—"and I dragged him by the feet; in through the mud I have dragged him, although my heart longed to see him float down the river to strand perchance on Bulangi's clearing—may his father's grave be defiled!"

There was subdued laughter at this, for the enmity of Mahmat and Bulangi was a matter of common notoriety and of undying interest to the inhabitants of Sambir. In the midst of that mirth Mrs. Almayer wailed suddenly again.

"Allah! What ails the woman!" exclaimed Mahmat, angrily. "Here, I have touched this carcass which came from nobody

knows where, and have most likely defiled myself before eating rice. By orders of Tuan Babalatchi I did this thing to please the white man. Are you pleased, O Tuan Almayer? And what will be my recompense? Tuan Babalatchi said a recompense there will be, and from you. Now consider. I have been defiled and if not defiled I may be under the spell. Look at his anklets! Who ever heard of a corpse appearing during the night amongst the logs with gold anklets on its legs? There is witchcraft there. However," added Mahmat, after a reflective pause. "I will have the anklet if there is permission, for I have a charm against the ghosts and am not afraid. God is great!"

A fresh outburst of noisy grief from Mrs. Almayer checked the flow of Mahmat's eloquence. Almayer, bewildered, looked in turn at his wife, at Mahmat, at Babalatchi, and at last arrested his fascinated gaze on the body lying on the mud with covered face in a grotesquely unnatural contortion of mangled and broken limbs, one twisted and lacerated arm, with white bones protruding in many places through the torn flesh, stretched out; the hand with outspread fingers nearly touching his foot.

"Do you know who this is?" he asked of Babalatchi, in a low voice.

Babalatchi, staring straight before him, hardly moved his lips, while Mrs. Almayer's persistent lamentations drowned the whisper of his murmured reply intended only for Almayer's ear.

"It was fate. Look at your feet, white man. I can see a ring on those torn fingers which I know well."

Saying this, Babalatchi stepped carelessly forward, putting his foot as if accidentally on the hand of the corpse and pressing it into the soft mud. He swung his staff menacingly towards the crowd, which fell back a little.

"Go away," he said sternly, "and send your women to their cooking fires, which they ought not to have left to run after a dead stranger. This is men's work here. I take him now in the name of the Rajah. Let no man remain here but Tuan Almayer's slaves. Now go!"

The crowd reluctantly began to disperse. The women went first, dragging away the children that hung back with all their weight on the maternal hand. The men strolled slowly after them in ever forming and changing groups that gradually dissolved as they neared the settlement and every man regained his own house with steps quickened by the hungry anticipation of the morning rice. Only on the slight elevation where the land sloped down towards the muddy point a few men, either friends or enemies of Mahmat, remained gazing curiously for some time longer at the small group standing around the body on the river bank.

"I do not understand what you mean, Babalatchi," said Almayer. "What is the ring you are talking about? Whoever he is, you have trodden the poor fellow's hand right into the mud. Uncover his face," he went on, addressing Mrs. Almayer, who, squatting by the head of the corpse, rocked herself to and fro, shaking from time to time her dishevelled grey locks, and muttering mournfully.

"Hai!" exclaimed Mahmat, who had lingered close by. "Look, Tuan; the logs came together so," and here he pressed the palms of his hands together, "and his head must have been between them, and now there is no face for you to look at. There are his flesh and his bones, the nose, and the lips, and maybe his eyes, but nobody could tell the one from the other. It was written the day he was born that no man could look at him in death and be able to say, 'This is my friend's face.'"

"Silence, Mahmat; enough!" said Babalatchi, "and take thy eyes off his anklet, thou eater of pigs flesh. Tuan Almayer," he went on, lowering his voice, "have you seen Dain this morning?"

Almayer opened his eyes wide and looked alarmed. "No," he said quickly; "haven't you seen him? Is he not with the Rajah? I am waiting; why does he not come?"

Babalatchi nodded his head sadly.

"He is come, Tuan. He left last night when the storm was great and the river spoke angrily. The night was very black, but he had within him a light that showed the way to your house as smooth as a narrow backwater, and the many logs no bigger than wisps of dried grass. Therefore he went; and now he lies here." And Babalatchi nodded his head towards the body.

"How can you tell?" said Almayer, excitedly, pushing his wife aside. He snatched the cover off and looked at the formless mass of flesh, hair, and drying mud, where the face of the drowned man should have been. "Nobody can tell," he added, turning away with a shudder.

Babalatchi was on his knees wiping the mud from the stiffened fingers of the outstretched hand. He rose to his feet and flashed before Almayer's eyes a gold ring set with a large green stone.

"You know this well," he said. "This never left Dain's hand. I had to tear the flesh now to get it off. Do you believe now?"

Almayer raised his hands to his head and let them fall listlessly by his side in the utter abandonment of despair. Babalatchi, looking at him curiously, was astonished to see him smile. A strange fancy had taken possession of Almayer's brain, distracted by this new misfortune. It seemed to him that for many years he had been falling into a deep precipice. Day after day, month

after month, year after year, he had been falling, falling, falling; it was a smooth, round, black thing, and the black walls had been rushing upwards with wearisome rapidity. A great rush, the noise of which he fancied he could hear yet; and now, with an awful shock, he had reached the bottom, and behold! he was alive and whole, and Dain was dead with all his bones broken. It struck him as funny. A dead Malay; he had seen many dead Malays without any emotion; and now he felt inclined to weep, but it was over the fate of a white man he knew; a man that fell over a deep precipice and did not die. He seemed somehow to himself to be standing on one side, a little way off, looking at a certain Almayer who was in great trouble. Poor, poor fellow! Why doesn't he cut his throat? He wished to encourage him; he was very anxious to see him lying dead over that other corpse. Why does he not die and end this suffering? He groaned aloud unconsciously and started with affright at the sound of his own voice. Was he going mad? Terrified by the thought he turned away and ran towards his house repeating to himself, "I am not going mad; of course not, no, no, no!" He tried to keep a firm hold of the idea. Not mad, not mad. He stumbled as he ran blindly up the steps repeating fast and ever faster those words wherein seemed to lie his salvation. He saw Nina standing there, and wished to say something to her, but could not remember what, in his extreme anxiety not to forget that he was not going mad, which he still kept repeating mentally as he ran round the table, till he stumbled against one of the arm-chairs and dropped into it exhausted. He sat staring wildly at Nina, still assuring himself mentally of his own sanity and wondering why the girl shrank from him in open-eyed alarm. What was the matter with her? This was foolish. He struck the table violently with his clenched fist and shouted hoarsely, "Give me some gin! Run!" Then, while Nina ran off, he remained in the chair, very still and quiet, astonished at the noise he had made.

Nina returned with a tumbler half filled with gin, and found her father staring absently before him. Almayer felt very tired now, as if he had come from a long journey. He felt as if he had walked miles and miles that morning and now wanted to rest very much. He took the tumbler with a shaking hand, and as he drank his teeth chattered against the glass which he drained and set down heavily on the table. He turned his eyes slowly towards Nina standing beside him, and said steadily—

"Now all is over, Nina. He is dead, and I may as well burn all my boats."

He felt very proud of being able to speak so calmly. Decidedly he was not going mad. This certitude was very comforting, and

he went on talking about the finding of the body, listening to his own voice complacently. Nina stood quietly, her hand resting lightly on her father's shoulder, her face unmoved, but every line of her features, the attitude of her whole body expressing the most keen and anxious attention.

"And so Dain is dead," she said coldly, when her father ceased speaking.

Almayer's elaborately calm demeanour gave way in a moment to an outburst of violent indignation.

"You stand there as if you were only half alive, and talk to me," he exclaimed angrily, "as if it was a matter of no importance. Yes, he is dead! Do you understand? Dead! What do you care? You never cared; you saw me struggle, and work, and strive, unmoved; and my suffering you could never see. No, never. You have no heart, and you have no mind, or you would have understood that it was for you, for your happiness I was working. I wanted to be rich; I wanted to get away from here. I wanted to see white men bowing low before the power of your beauty and your wealth. Old as I am I wished to seek a strange land, a civilization to which I am a stranger, so as to find a new life in the contemplation of your high fortunes, of your triumphs, of your happiness. For that I bore patiently the burden of work, of disappointment, of humiliation amongst these savages here, and I had it all nearly in my grasp."

He looked at his daughter's attentive face and jumped to his feet upsetting the chair.

"Do you hear? I had it all there; so; within reach of my hand."

He paused, trying to keep down his rising anger, and failed.

"Have you no feeling?" he went on. "Have you lived without hope?" Nina's silence exasperated him; his voice rose, although he tried to master his feelings.

"Are you content to live in this misery and die in this wretched hole? Say something, Nina; have you no sympathy? Have you no word of comfort for me? I that loved you so."

He waited for an answer, and receiving none shook his fist in his daughter's face.

"I believe you are an idiot!" he yelled.

He looked round for the chair, picked it up and sat down stiffly. His anger was dead within him, and he felt ashamed of his outburst, yet relieved to think that now he had laid clear before his daughter the inner meaning of his life. He thought so in perfect good faith, deceived by the emotional estimate of his motives, unable to see the crookedness of his ways, the unreality of his aims, the futility of his regrets. And now his heart was filled

only with a great tenderness and love for his daughter. He wanted to see her miserable, and to share with her his despair; but he wanted it only as all weak natures long for a companionship in misfortune with beings innocent of its cause. If she suffered herself she would understand and pity him; but now she would not, or could not, find one word of comfort or love for him in his dire extremity. The sense of his absolute loneliness came home to his heart with a force that made him shudder. He swayed and fell forward with his face on the table, his arms stretched straight out, extended and rigid. Nina made a quick movement towards her father and stood looking at the grey head, on the broad shoulders shaken convulsively by the violence of feelings that found relief at last in sobs and tears.

Nina sighed deeply and moved away from the table. Her features lost the appearance of stony indifference that had exasperated her father into his outburst of anger and sorrow. The expression of her face, now unseen by her father, underwent a rapid change. She had listened to Almayer's appeal for sympathy, for one word of comfort, apparently indifferent, yet with her breast torn by conflicting impulses raised unexpectedly by events she had not foreseen, or at least did not expect to happen so soon. With her heart deeply moved by the sight of Almayer's misery, knowing it in her power to end it with a word, longing to bring peace to that troubled heart, she heard with terror the voice of her overpowering love commanding her to be silent. And she submitted after a short and fierce struggle of her old self against the new principle of her life. She wrapped herself up in absolute silence, the only safeguard against some fatal admission. She could not trust herself to make a sign, to murmur a word for fear of saying too much; and the very violence of the feelings that stirred the innermost recesses of her soul seemed to turn her person into a stone. The dilated nostrils and the flashing eyes were the only signs of the storm raging within, and those signs of his daughter's emotion Almayer did not see, for his sight was dimmed by self-pity, by anger, and by despair.

Had Almayer looked at his daughter as she leant over the front rail of the verandah he could have seen the expression of indifference give way to a look of pain and that again pass away, leaving the glorious beauty of her face marred by deep-drawn lines of watchful anxiety. The long grass in the neglected courtyard stood very straight before her eyes in the noonday heat. From the river-bank there were voices and a shuffle of bare feet approaching the house; Babalatchi could be heard giving directions to Almayer's men, and Mrs. Almayer's subdued wailing became audible as the small procession bearing the body of the

drowned man and headed by that sorrowful matron turned the corner of the house. Babalatchi had taken the broken anklet off the man's leg, and now held it in his hand as he moved by the side of the bearers, while Mahmat lingered behind timidly, in the hopes of the promised reward.

"Lay him there," said Babalatchi to Almayer's men, pointing to a pile of drying planks in front of the verandah. "Lay him there. He was a Kaffir and the son of a dog, and he was the white man's friend. He drank the white man's strong water," he added, with affected horror. "That I have seen myself."

The men stretched out the broken limbs on two planks they had laid level, while Mrs. Almayer covered the body with a piece of white cotton cloth, and after whispering for some time with Babalatchi departed to her domestic duties. Almayer's men, after laying down their burden, dispersed themselves in quest of shady spots wherein to idle the day away. Babalatchi was left alone by the corpse that laid rigid under the white cloth in the bright sunshine.

Nina came down the steps and joined Babalatchi, who put his hand to his forehead, and squatted down with great deference.

"You have a bangle there," said Nina, looking down on Babalatchi's upturned face and into his solitary eye.

"I have, Mem Putih," returned the polite statesman. Then turning towards Mahmat he beckoned him closer, calling out, "Come here!"

Mahmat approached with some hesitation. He avoided looking at Nina, but fixed his eyes on Babalatchi.

"Now, listen," said Babalatchi, sharply. "The ring and the anklet you have seen, and you know they belonged to Dain the trader, and to no other. Dain returned last night in a canoe. He spoke with the Rajah, and in the middle of the night left to cross over to the white man's house. There was a great flood, and this morning you found him in the river."

"By his feet I dragged him out," muttered Mahmat under his breath. "Tuan Babalatchi, there will be a recompense!" he exclaimed aloud.

Babalatchi held up the gold bangle before Mahmat's eyes. "What I have told you, Mahmat, is for all ears. What I give you now is for your eyes only. Take."

Mahmat took the bangle eagerly and hid it in the folds of his waist-cloth. "Am I a fool to show this thing in a house with three women in it?" he growled. "But I shall tell them about Dain the trader, and there will be talk enough."

He turned and went away, increasing his pace as soon as he was outside Almayer's compound.

Babalatchi looked after him till he disappeared behind the bushes. "Have I done well, Mem Putih?" he asked, humbly addressing Nina.

"You have," answered Nina. "The ring you may keep yourself."

Babalatchi touched his lips and forehead, and scrambled to his feet. He looked at Nina, as if expecting her to say something more, but Nina turned towards the house and went up the steps, motioning him away with her hand.

Babalatchi picked up his staff and prepared to go. It was very warm, and he did not care for the long pull to the Rajah's house. Yet he must go and tell the Rajah—tell of the event; of the change in his plans; of all his suspicions. He walked to the jetty and began casting off the rattan painter of his canoe.

The broad expanse of the lower reach, with its shimmering surface dotted by the black specks of the fishing canoes, lay before his eyes. The fishermen seemed to be racing. Babalatchi paused in his work, and looked on with sudden interest. The man in the foremost canoe, now within hail of the first houses of Sambir, laid in his paddle and stood up shouting—

"The boats! the boats! The man-of-war's boats are coming! They are here!"

In a moment the settlement was again alive with people rushing to the riverside. The men began to unfasten their boats, the women stood in groups looking towards the bend down the river. Above the trees lining the reach a slight puff of smoke appeared like a black stain on the brilliant blue of the cloudless sky.

Babalatchi stood perplexed, the painter in his hand. He looked down the reach, then up towards Almayer's house, and back again at the river as if undecided what to do. At last he made the canoe fast again hastily, and ran towards the house and up the steps of the verandah.

"Tuan! Tuan!" he called, eagerly. "The boats are coming. The man-of-war's boats. You had better get ready. The officers will come here, I know."

Almayer lifted his head slowly from the table, and looked at him stupidly.

"Mem Putih!" exclaimed Babalatchi to Nina, "look at him. He does not hear. You must take care," he added meaningly.

Nina nodded to him with an uncertain smile, and was going to speak when, a sharp report from the gun mounted in the bow of the steam launch that was just then coming into view arrested the words on her parted lips. The smile died out, and was replaced by the old look of anxious attention. From the hills

far away the echo came back like a long-drawn and mournful sigh, as if the land had sent it in answer to the voice of its masters.

8

THE news as to the identity of the body lying now in Almayer's compound spread rapidly over the settlement. During the forenoon most of the inhabitants remained in the long street discussing the mysterious return and the unexpected death of the man who had become known to them as the trader. His arrival during the northeast monsoon, his long sojourn in their midst, his sudden departure with his brig, and, above all, the mysterious appearance of the body, said to be his, amongst the logs, were subjects to wonder at and to talk over and over again with undiminished interest. Mahmat moved from house to house and from group to group, always ready to repeat his tale: how he saw the body caught by the sarong in a forked log; how Mrs. Almayer coming, one of the first, at his cries, recognized it, even before he had it hauled on shore; how Babalatchi ordered him to bring it out of the water. "By the feet I dragged him in, and there was no head," exclaimed Mahmat, "and how could the white man's wife know who it was? She was a witch, it was well known. And did you see how the white man himself ran away at the sight of the body? Like a deer he ran!" And here Mahmat imitated Almayer's long strides, to the great joy of the beholders. And for all his trouble he had nothing. The ring with the green stone Tuan Babalatchi kept. "Nothing! Nothing!" He spat down at his feet in sign of disgust, and left that group to seek further on a fresh audience.

The news spreading to the furthestmost parts of the settlement found out Abdulla in the cool recess of his godown, where he sat overlooking his Arab clerks and the men loading and unloading the up-country canoes. Reshid, who was busy on the jetty, was summoned into his uncle's presence and found him, as usual, very calm and even cheerful, but very much surprised. The rumour of the capture or destruction of Dain's brig had reached the Arab's ears three days before from the sea-fishermen and through the dwellers on the lower reaches of the river. It had been passed upstream from neighbour to neighbour till Bulangi, whose clearing was nearest to the settlement, had brought that news himself to Abdulla whose favour he courted. But rumour also spoke of a fight and of Dain's death on board his own vessel.

And now all the settlement talked of Dain's visit to the Rajah and of his death when crossing the river in the dark to see Almayer. They could not understand this. Reshid thought that it was very strange. He felt uneasy and doubtful. But Abdulla, after the first shock of surprise, with the old age's dislike for solving riddles, showed a becoming resignation. He remarked that the man was dead now at all events, and consequently no more dangerous. Where was the use to wonder at the decrees of Fate, especially if they were propitious to the True Believers? And with a pious ejaculation to Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate, Abdulla seemed to regard the incident as closed for the present.

Not so Reshid. He lingered by his uncle, pulling thoughtfully his neatly trimmed beard.

"There are many lies," he murmured. "He has been dead once before, and came to life to die again now. The Dutch will be here before many days and clamour for the man. Shall I not believe my eyes sooner than the tongues of women and idle men?"

"They say that the body is being taken to Almayer's compound," said Abdulla. "If you want to go there you must go before the Dutch arrive here. Go late. It should not be said that we have been seen inside that man's enclosure lately."

Reshid assented to the truth of this last remark and left his uncle's side. He leaned against the lintel of the big doorway and looked idly across the courtyard through the open gate on to the main road of the settlement. It lay empty, straight, and yellow, under the flood of light. In the hot noontide the smooth trunks of palm trees, the outlines of the houses, and away there at the other end of the road the roof of Almayer's house visible over the bushes on the dark background of forest, seemed to quiver in the heat radiating from the steaming earth. Swarms of yellow butterflies rose, and settled to rise again in short flights before Reshid's half-closed eyes. From under his feet arose the dull hum of insects in the long grass of the courtyard. He looked on sleepily.

From one of the side paths amongst the houses a woman stepped out on the road, a slight girlish figure walking under the shade of a large tray balanced on its head. The consciousness of something moving stirred Reshid's half-sleeping senses into a comparative wakefulness. He recognized Taminah, Bulangi's slave-girl, with her tray of cakes for sale—an apparition of daily recurrence and of no importance whatever. She was going towards Almayer's house. She could be made useful. He roused himself up and ran towards the gate calling out, "Taminah O!" The girl stopped, hesitated, and came back slowly. Reshid waited, signing to her impatiently to come nearer.

When near Reshid Taminah stood with downcast eyes. Reshid looked at her a while before he asked—

"Are you going to Almayer's house? They say in the settlement that Dain the trader, he that was found drowned this morning, is lying in the white man's campong."

"I have heard this talk," whispered Taminah; "and this morning by the riverside I saw the body. Where it is now I do not know."

"So you have seen it?" asked Reshid, eagerly. "Is it Dain? You have seen him many times. You would know him."

The girl's lips quivered and she remained silent for a while breathing quickly.

"I have seen him, not a long time ago," she said at last. "The talk is true; he is dead. What do you want from me, Tuan? I must go."

Just then the report of the gun fired on board the steam launch was heard, interrupting Reshid's reply. Leaving the girl he ran to the house, and met in the courtyard Abdulla coming towards the gate.

"The Orang Blanda are come," said Reshid, "and now we shall have our reward."

Abdulla shook his head doubtfully. "The white man's rewards are long in coming," he said. "White men are quick in anger and slow in gratitude. We shall see."

He stood at the gate stroking his grey beard and listening to the distant cries of greeting at the other end of the settlement. As Taminah was turning to go he called her back.

"Listen, girl," he said: "there will be many white men in Almayer's house. You shall be there selling your cakes to the men of the sea. What you see and what you hear you may tell me. Come here before the sun sets and I will give you a blue handkerchief with red spots. Now go, and forget not to return."

He gave her a push with the end of his long staff as she was going away and made her stumble.

"This slave is very slow," he remarked to his nephew, looking after the girl with great disfavour. —

Taminah walked on, her tray on the head, her eyes fixed on the ground. From the open doors of the houses were heard, as she passed, friendly calls inviting her within for business purposes, but she never heeded them, neglecting her sales in the pre-occupation of intense thinking. Since the very early morning she had heard much, she had also seen much that filled her heart with a joy mingled with great suffering and fear. Before the dawn, before she left Bulangi's house to paddle up to Sambir she had heard voices outside the house when all in it, but herself were

asleep. And now, with her knowledge of the words spoken in the darkness, she held in her hand a life and carried in her breast, a great sorrow. Yet from her springy step, erect figure, and face veiled over by the every-day look of apathetic indifference, nobody could have guessed of the double load she carried under the visible burden of the tray piled up high with cakes manufactured by the thrifty hands of Bulangi's wives. In that supple figure straight as an arrow, so graceful and free in its walk, behind those soft eyes that spoke of nothing but of unconscious resignation, there slept all feelings and all passions, all hopes and all fears, the curse of life and the consolation of death. And she knew nothing of it all. She lived like the tall palms amongst whom she was passing now, seeking the light, desiring the sunshine, fearing the storm, unconscious of either. The slave had no hope, and knew of no change. She knew of no other sky, no other water, no other forest, no other world, no other life. She had no wish, no hope, no love, no fear except of a blow, and no vivid feeling but that of occasional hunger, which was seldom, for Bulangi was rich and rice was plentiful in the solitary house in his clearing. The absence of pain and hunger was her happiness, and when she felt unhappy she was simply tired, more than usual, after the day's labour. Then in the hot nights of the southwest monsoon she slept dreamlessly under the bright stars on the platform built outside the house and over the river. Inside they slept too: Bulangi by the door; his wives further in; the children with their mothers. She could hear their breathing; Bulangi's sleepy voice; the sharp cry of a child soon hushed with tender words. And she closed her eyes to the murmur of the water below her, to the whisper of the warm wind above, ignorant of the never-ceasing life of that tropical nature that spoke to her in vain with the thousand faint voices of the near forest, with the breath of tepid wind; in the heavy scents that lingered around her head; in the white wraiths of morning mist that hung over her in the solemn hush of all creation before the dawn.

Such had been her existence before the coming of the brig with the strangers. She remembered well that time; the uproar in the settlement, the never-ending wonder, the days and nights of talk and excitement. She remembered her own timidity with the strange men, till the brig moored to the bank became in a manner part of the settlement, and the fear wore off in the familiarity of constant intercourse. The call on board then became part of her daily round. She walked hesitatingly up the slanting planks of the gangway amidst the encouraging shouts and more or less decent jokes of the men idling over the bulwarks. There she sold her wares to those men that spoke so loud and carried

themselves so free. There was a throng, a constant coming and going; calls interchanged, orders given and executed with shouts; the rattle of blocks, the flinging about of coils of rope. She sat out of the way under the shade of the awning, with her tray before her, the veil drawn well over her face, feeling shy amongst so many men. She smiled at all buyers, but spoke to none, letting their jests pass with stolid unconcern. She heard many tales told around her of far-off countries, of strange customs, of events stranger still. Those men were brave; but the most fearless of them spoke of their chief with fear. Often the man they called their master passed before her, walking erect and indifferent, in the pride of youth, in the flash of rich dress, with a tinkle of gold ornaments, while everybody stood aside watching anxiously for a movement of his lips, ready to do his bidding. Then all her life seemed to rush into her eyes, and from her veil she gazed at him, charmed yet fearful to attract attention. One day he noticed her and asked, "Who is that girl?" "A slave, Tuan! A girl that sells cakes," a dozen voices replied together. She rose in terror to run on shore, when he called her back; and as she stood trembling with head hung down before him, he spoke kind words, lifting her chin with his hand and looking into her eyes with a smile. "Do not be afraid," he said. He never spoke to her any more. Somebody called out from the river-bank; he turned away and forgot her existence. Taminah saw Almayer standing on the shore with Nina on his arm. She heard Nina's voice calling out gaily, and saw Dain's face brighten with joy as he leaped on shore. She hated the sound of that voice ever since.

After that day she left off visiting Almayer's compound, and passed the noon hours under the shade of the brig awning. She watched for his coming with heart beating quicker and quicker, as he approached, into a wild tumult of newly-aroused feelings of joy and hope and fear that died away with Dain's retreating figure, leaving her tired out, as if after a struggle, sitting still for a long time in dreamy languor. Then she paddled home slowly in the afternoon, often letting her canoe float with the lazy stream in the quiet backwater of the river. The paddle hung idle in the water as she sat in the stern, one hand supporting her chin, her eyes wide open, listening intently to the whispering of her heart that seemed to swell at last into a song of extreme sweetness. Listening to that song she husked the rice at home; it dulled her ears to the shrill bickerings of Bulangi's wives, to the sound of angry reproaches addressed to herself. And when the sun was near its setting she walked to the bathing-place and heard it as she stood on the tender grass of the low bank, her robe at her feet,

and looked at the reflection of her figure on the glass-like surface of the creek. Listening to it she walked slowly back, her wet hair hanging over her shoulders; laying down to rest under the bright stars, she closed her eyes to the murmur of the water below, of the warm wind above; to the voice of nature speaking through the faint noises of the great forest, and to the song of her own heart.

She heard, but did not understand, and drank in the dreamy joy of her new existence without troubling about its meaning or its end, till the full consciousness of life came to her through pain and anger. And she suffered horribly the first time she saw Nina's long canoe drift silently past the sleeping house of Bulangi, bearing the two lovers into the white mist of the great river. Her jealousy and rage culminated into a paroxysm of physical pain that left her lying panting on the riverbank, in the dumb agony of a wounded animal. But she went on moving patiently in the enchanted circle of slavery, going through her task day after day with all the pathos of the grief she could not express, even to herself, locked within her breast. She shrank from Nina as she would have shrunk from the sharp blade of a knife cutting into her flesh, but she kept on visiting the brig to feed her dumb, ignorant soul on her own despair. She saw Dain many times. He never spoke, he never looked. Could his eyes see only one woman's image? Could his ears hear only one woman's voice? He never noticed her; not once.

And then he went away. She saw him and Nina for the last time on that morning when Babalatchi, while visiting his fish baskets, had his suspicions of the white man's daughter's love affair with Dain confirmed beyond the shadow of doubt. Dain disappeared and, Taminah's heart, where lay useless and barren the seeds of all love and of all hate, the possibilities of all passions and of all sacrifices, forgot its joys and its sufferings when deprived of the help of the senses. Her half-formed, savage mind, the slave of her body—as her body was the slave of another's will—forgot the faint and vague image of the ideal that had found its beginning in the physical promptings of her savage nature. She dropped back into the torpor of her former life and found consolation—even a certain kind of happiness—in the thought that now Nina and Dain were separated, probably for ever. He would forget. This thought soothed the last pangs of dying jealousy that had nothing now to feed upon, and Taminah found peace. It was like the dreary tranquillity of a desert, where there is peace only because there is no life.

And now he had returned. She had recognized his voice calling aloud in the night for Bulangi. She had crept out after

her master to listen closer to the intoxicating sound. Dain was there, in a boat, talking to Bulangi. Taminah, listening with arrested breath, heard another voice. The maddening joy, that only a second before she thought herself incapable of containing within her fast-beating heart, died out, and left her shivering in the old anguish of physical pain that she had suffered once before at the sight of Dain and Nina. Nina spoke now, ordering and entreating in turns, and Bulangi was refusing, expostulating, at last consenting. He went in to take a paddle from the heap lying behind the door. Outside the murmur of two voices went on, and she caught a word here and there. She understood that he was fleeing from white men, that he was seeking a hiding-place, that he was in some danger. But she heard also words which woke the rage of jealousy that had been asleep for so many days in her bosom. Crouching low on the mud in the black darkness amongst the piles, she heard the whisper in the boat that made light of toil, of privation, of danger, of life itself, if in exchange there could be but a short moment of close embrace, a look from the eyes, the feel of light breath, the touch of soft lips. So spoke Dain as he sat in the canoe holding Nina's hands while waiting for Bulangi's return; and Taminah, supporting herself by the slimy pile, felt as if a heavy weight was crushing her down, down into the black oily water at her feet. She wanted to cry out; to rush at them and tear their vague shadows apart; to throw Nina into the smooth water, cling to her close, hold her to the bottom where that man could not find her. She could not cry, she could not move. Then footsteps were heard on the bamboo platform above her head; she saw Bulangi get into his smallest canoe and take the lead, the other boat following, paddled by Dain and Nina. With a slight splash of the paddles dipped stealthily into the water, their indistinct forms passed before her aching eyes and vanished in the darkness of the creek.

She remained there in the cold and wet, powerless to move, breathing painfully under the crushing weight that the mysterious hand of Fate had laid so suddenly upon her slender shoulders, and shivering, she felt within a burning fire, that seemed to feed upon her very life. When the breaking day had spread a pale golden ribbon over the black outline of the forests, she took up her tray and departed towards the settlement, going about her task purely from the force of habit. As she approached Sambir she could see the excitement and she heard with momentary surprise of the finding of Dain's body. It was not true, of course. She knew it well. She regretted that he was not dead. She should have liked Dain to be dead, so as to be parted from that woman—from all women. She felt a strong desire to see Nina, but without

any clear object. She hated her, and feared her, and she felt an irresistible impulse pushing her towards Almayer's house to see the white woman's face, to look close at those eyes, to hear again that voice, for the sound of which Dain was ready to risk his liberty, his life even. She had seen her many times; she had heard her voice daily for many months past. What was there in her? What was there in that being to make a man speak as Dain had spoken, to make him blind to all other faces, deaf to all other voices?

She left the crowd by the riverside, and wandered aimlessly among the empty houses, resisting the impulse that pushed her towards Almayer's campong to seek there in Nina's eyes the secret of her own misery. The sun mounting higher, shortened the shadows and poured down upon her a flood of light and of stifling heat as she passed on from shadow to light, from light to shadow amongst the houses, the bushes, the tall trees, in her unconscious flight from the pain in her own heart. In the extremity of her distress she could find no words to pray for relief, she knew of no heaven to send her prayer to, and she wandered on with tired feet in the dumb surprise and terror at the injustice of the suffering inflicted upon her without cause and without redress.

The short talk with Reshid, the proposal of Abdulla steadied her a little and turned her thoughts into another channel. Dain was in some danger. He was hiding from white men. So much she had overheard last night. They all thought him dead. She knew he was alive, and she knew of his hiding-place. What did the Arabs want to know about the white men? The white men want with Dain? Did they wish to kill him? She could tell them all—no, she would say nothing, and in the night she would go to him and sell him his life for a word, for a smile, for a gesture even, and be his slave in far-off countries, away from Nina. But there were dangers. The one-eyed Babalatchi who knew everything; the white man's wife!—she was a witch. Perhaps they would tell. And then there was Nina. She must hurry on and see.

In her impatience she left the path and ran towards Almayer's dwelling through the undergrowth between the palm trees. She came out at the back of the house, where a narrow ditch, full of stagnant water that overflowed from the river, separated Almayer's campong from the rest of the settlement. The thick bushes growing on the bank were hiding from her sight the large courtyard with its cooking shed. Above them rose several thin columns of smoke, and from behind the sound of strange voices informed Taminah that the Men of the Sea belonging to the warship had already landed and were camped between the ditch and the house. To the left one of Almayer's slave-girls came down to

the ditch and bent over the shiny water, washing a kettle. To the right the tops of the banana plantation, visible above the bushes, swayed and shook under the touch of invisible hands gathering the fruit. On the calm water several canoes moored to a heavy stake were crowded together, nearly bridging the ditch just at the place where Taminah stood. The voices in the courtyard rose at times into an outburst of calls, replies, and laughter, and then died away into a silence that soon was broken again by a fresh clamour. Now and again the thin blue smoke rushed out thicker and blacker, and drove in odorous masses over the creek, wrapping her for a moment in a suffocating veil; then, as the fresh wood caught well alight, the smoke vanished in the bright sunlight, and only the scent of aromatic wood drifted afar, to leeward of the crackling fires.

Taminah rested her tray on a stump of a tree, and remained standing with her eyes turned towards Almayer's house, whose roof and part of a whitewashed wall were visible over the bushes. The slave-girl finished her work, and after looking for a while curiously at Taminah, pushed her way through the dense thicket back to the courtyard. Round Taminah there was now a complete solitude. She threw herself down on the ground, and hid her face in her hands. Now when so close she had no courage to see Nina. At every burst of louder voices from the courtyard she shivered in the fear of hearing Nina's voice. She came to the resolution of waiting where she was till dark, and then going straight to Dain's hiding-place. From where she was she could watch the movements of white men, of Nina, of all Dain's friends, and of all his enemies. Both were hateful alike to her, for both would take him away beyond her reach. She hid herself in the long grass to wait anxiously for the sunset that seemed so slow to come.

On the other side of the ditch, behind the bush, by the clear fires, the seamen of the frigate had encamped on the hospitable invitation of Almayer. Almayer, roused out of his apathy by the prayers and importunity of Nina, had managed to get down in time to the jetty so as to receive the officers at their landing. The lieutenant in command accepted his invitation to his house with the remark that in any case their business was with Almayer—and perhaps not very pleasant, he added. Almayer hardly heard him. He shook hands with them absently and led the way towards the house. He was scarcely conscious of the polite words of welcome he greeted the strangers with, and afterwards repeated several times over again in his efforts to appear at ease. The agitation of their host did not escape the officer's eyes, and the chief confided to his subordinate, in a low voice, his doubts as to Almayer's sobriety. The young sub-lieutenant laughed and

expressed in a whisper the hope that the white man was not intoxicated enough to neglect the offer of some refreshments. "He does not seem very dangerous," he added, as they followed Almayer up the steps of the verandah.

"No, he seems more of a fool than a knave; I have heard of him," returned the senior.

They sat around the table. Almayer with shaking hands made gin cocktails, offered them all round, and drank himself, with every gulp feeling stronger, steadier, and better able to face all the difficulties of his position. Ignorant of the fate of the brig he did not suspect the real object of the officer's visit. He had a general notion that something must have leaked out about the gunpowder trade, but apprehended nothing beyond some temporary inconvenience. After emptying his glass he began to chat easily, lying back in his chair with one of his legs thrown negligently over the arm. The lieutenant astride on his chair, a glowing cheroot in the corner of his mouth, listened with a sly smile from behind the thick volumes of smoke that escaped from his compressed lips. The young sub-lieutenant, leaning with both elbows on the table, his head between his hands, looked on sleepily in the torpor induced by fatigue and the gin. Almayer talked on—

"It is a great pleasure to see white faces here. I have lived here many years in great solitude. The Malays, you understand, are not company for a white man; moreover they are not friendly; they do not understand our ways. Great rascals they are. I believe I am the only white man on the east coast that is a settled resident. We get visitors from Macassar or Singapore sometimes — traders, agents, or explorers, but they are rare. There was a scientific explorer here a year or more ago. He lived in my house: drank from morning to night. He lived joyously for a few months, and when the liquor he brought with him was gone he returned to Batavia with a report on the mineral wealth of the interior. Ha, ha, ha! Good, is it not?"

He ceased abruptly and looked at his guests with a meaningless stare. While they laughed he was reciting to himself the old story: "Dain dead, all my plans destroyed. This is the end of all hope and of all things." His heart sank within him. He felt a kind of deadly sickness.

"Very good. Capital!" exclaimed both officers.

Almayer came out of his despondency with another burst of talk.

"Eh! what about the dinner? You have got a cook with you. That's all right. There is a cooking shed in the other courtyard. I can give you a goose. Look at my geese—the only geese on the

east coast—perhaps on the whole island. Is that your cook? Very good. Here, Ali, show this Chinaman the cooking place and tell Mem Almayer to let him have room there. My wife, gentlemen, does not come out; my daughter may. Meantime have some more drink. It is a hot day."

The lieutenant took the cigar out of his mouth, looked at the ash critically, shook it off and turned towards Almayer.

"We have a rather unpleasant business with you," he said.

"I am sorry," returned Almayer. "It can be nothing very serious, surely."

"If you think an attempt to blow up forty men at least, not a serious matter you will not find many people of your opinion," retorted the officer sharply.

"Blow up! What? I know nothing about it," exclaimed Almayer. "Who did that, or tried to do it?"

"A man with whom you had some dealings," answered the lieutenant. "He passed here under the name of Dain Maroola. You sold him the gunpowder he had in that brig we captured."

"How did you hear about the brig?" asked Almayer. "I know nothing about the powder he may have had."

"An Arab trader of this place has sent the information about your goings on here to Batavia, a couple of months ago," said the officer. "We were waiting for the brig outside, but he slipped past us at the mouth of the river, and we had to chase the fellow to the southward. When he sighted us he ran inside the reefs and put the brig ashore. The crew escaped in boats before we could take possession. As our boats neared the craft it blew up with a tremendous explosion; one of the boats being too near got swamped. Two men drowned—that is the result of your speculation, Mr. Almayer. Now we want this Dain. We have good grounds to suppose he is hiding in Sambir. Do you know where he is? You had better put yourself right with the authorities as much as possible by being perfectly frank with me. Where is this Dain?"

Almayer got up and walked towards the balustrade of the verandah. He seemed not to be thinking of the officer's question. He looked at the body laying straight and rigid under its white cover on which the sun, declining amongst the clouds to the westward, threw a pale tinge of red. The lieutenant waited for the answer, taking quick pulls at his half-extinguished cigar. Behind them Ali moved noiselessly laying the table, ranging solemnly the ill-assorted and shabby crockery, the tin spoons, the forks with broken prongs, and the knives with saw-like blades and loose handles. He had almost forgotten how to prepare the table for white men. He felt aggrieved; Mem Nina would not

help him. He stepped back to look at his work admiringly, feeling very proud. This must be right; and if the master afterwards is angry and swears, then so much the worse for Mem Nina. Why did she not help? He left the verandah to fetch the dinner.

"Well, Mr. Almayer, will you answer my question as frankly as it is put to you?" asked the lieutenant, after a long silence.

Almayer turned round and looked at his interlocutor steadily. "If you catch this Dain what will you do with him?" he asked.

The officer's face flushed. "This is not an answer," he said, annoyed.

"And what will you do with me?" went on Almayer, not heeding the interruption.

"Are you inclined to bargain?" growled the other. "It would be bad policy, I assure you. At present I have no orders about your person, but we expected your assistance in catching this Malay."

"Ah!" interrupted Almayer, "just so: you can do nothing without me, and I, knowing the man well, am to help you in finding him."

"This is exactly what we expect," assented the officer. "You have broken the law, Mr. Almayer, and you ought to make amends."

"And save myself?"

"Well, in a sense yes. Your head is not in any danger," said the lieutenant, with a short laugh.

"Very well," said Almayer, with decision, "I shall deliver the man up to you."

Both officers rose to their feet quickly, and looked for their side-arms which they had unbuckled. Almayer laughed harshly.

"Steady, gentlemen!" he exclaimed. "In my own time and in my own way. After dinner, gentlemen, you shall have him."

"This is preposterous," urged the lieutenant. "Mr. Almayer, this is no joking matter. The man is a criminal. He deserves to hang. While we dine he may escape; the rumour of our arrival——"

Almayer walked towards the table. "I give you my word of honour, gentlemen, that he shall not escape; I have him safe enough."

"The arrest should be effected before dark," remarked the young sub.

"I shall hold you responsible for any failure. We are ready, but can do nothing just now without you," added the senior, with evident annoyance.

Almayer made a gesture of assent. "On my word of honour,"

he repeated vaguely. "And now let us dine," he added briskly.

Nina came through the doorway and stood for a moment holding the curtain aside for Ali and the old Malay woman bearing the dishes; then she moved towards the three men by the table.

"Allow me," said Almayer, pompously. "This is my daughter. Nina, these gentlemen, officers of the frigate outside, have done me the honour to accept my hospitality."

Nina answered the low bows of the two officers by a slow inclination of the head and took her place at the table opposite her father. All sat down. The coxswain of the steam launch came up carrying some bottles of wine.

"You will allow me to have this put upon the table?" said the lieutenant to Almayer.

"What! Wine! You are very kind. Certainly. I have none myself. Times are very hard."

The last words of his reply were spoken by Almayer in a faltering voice. The thought that Dain was dead recurred to him vividly again, and he felt as if an invisible hand was gripping his throat. He reached for the gin bottle while they were uncorking the wine and swallowed a big gulp. The lieutenant, who was speaking to Nina, gave him a quick glance. The young sub began to recover from the astonishment and confusion caused by Nina's unexpected appearance and great beauty. "She was very beautiful and imposing," he reflected, "but after all a half-caste girl." This thought caused him to pluck up heart and look at Nina sideways. Nina, with composed face, was answering in a low, even voice the elder officer's polite questions as to the country and her mode of life. Almayer pushed his plate away and drank his guest's wine in gloomy silence.

9

"CAN I believe what you tell me? It is like a tale for men that listen only half awake by the camp fire, and it seems to have run off a woman's tongue."

"Who is there here for me to deceive, O Rajah?" answered Babalatchi. "Without you I am nothing. All I have told you I believe to be true. I have been safe for many years in the hollow of your hand. This is no time to harbour suspicions. The danger is very great. We should advise and act at once, before the sun sets."

"Right. Right," muttered Lakamba, pensively.

They had been sitting for the last hour together in the audience chamber of the Rajah's house, for Babalatchi, as soon as he had witnessed the landing of the Dutch officers had crossed the river to report to his master the events of the morning, and to confer with him upon the line of conduct to pursue in the face of altered circumstances. They were both puzzled and frightened by the unexpected turn the events had taken. The Rajah, sitting cross-legged on his chair, looked fixedly at the floor; Babalatchi was squatting close by in an attitude of deep dejection.

"And where did you say he is hiding now?" asked Lakamba, breaking at last the silence full of gloomy forebodings in which they both had been lost for a long while.

"In Bulangi's clearing—the furthest one, away from the house. They went there that very night. The white man's daughter took him there. She told me so herself, speaking to me openly, for she is half white and has no decency. She said she was waiting for him while he was here; then, after a long time, he came out of the darkness and fell at her feet exhausted. He lay like one dead, but she brought him back to life in her arms, and made him breathe again with her own breath. That is what she said, speaking to my face, as I am speaking now to you, Rajah. She is like a white woman and knows no shame."

He paused, deeply shocked. Lakamba nodded his head. "Well, and then?" he asked.

"They called the old woman," went on Babalatchi, "and he told them all—about the brig, and how he tried to kill many men. He knew the Orang Blanda were very near, although he has said nothing to us about that; he knew his great danger. He thought he had killed many, but there were only two dead, as I have heard from the men of the sea that came in the warship's boats."

"And the other man, he that was found in the river?" interrupted Lakamba.

"That was one of his boatmen. When his canoe was overturned by the logs those two swam together, but the other man must have been hurt. Dain swam holding him up. He left him in the bushes when he went up to the house. When they all came down his heart had ceased to beat; then the old woman spoke; Dain thought it was good. He took off his anklet and broke it, twisting it round the man's foot. His ring he put on that slave's hand. He took off his sarong and clothed that thing that wanted no clothes, the two women holding it up meanwhile, their intent being to deceive all eyes and to mislead the minds in the settlement, so that they could swear to the thing that was not, and that there could be no treachery when the white men came. Then

Dain and the white woman departed to call up Bulangi and find a hiding-place. The old woman remained by the body."

"Hai!" exclaimed Lakamba. "She has wisdom."

"Yes, she has a Devil of her own to whisper counsel in her ear," assented Babalatchi. "She dragged the body with great toil to the point where many logs were stranded. All these things were done in the darkness after the storm had passed away. Then she waited. At the first sign of daylight she battered the face of the dead with a heavy stone, and she pushed him amongst the logs. She remained near, watching. At sunrise Mahmat Banjer came and found him. They all believed; I myself was deceived, but not for long. The white man believed, and, grieving, fled to his house. When we were alone, I, having doubts, spoke to the woman, and she, fearing my anger and your might, told me all, asking for help in saving Dain."

"He must not fall into the hands of the Orang Blanda," said Lakamba; "but let him die, if the thing can be done quietly."

"It cannot, Tuan! Remember there is that woman who, being half white, is ungovernable, and would raise a great outcry. Also the officers are here. They are angry enough already. Dain must escape; he must go. We must help him now for our own safety."

"Are the officers very angry?" inquired Lakamba, with interest.

"They are. The principal chief used strong words when speaking to me—to me when I salaamed in your name. I do not think," added Babalatchi, after a short pause and looking very worried—"I do not think I saw a white chief so angry before. He said we were careless or even worse. He told me he would speak to the Rajah, and that I was of no account."

"Speak to the Rajah!" repeated Lakamba, thoughtfully. "Listen, Babalatchi: I am sick, and shall withdraw; you cross over and tell the white men."

"Yes," said Babalatchi, "I am going over at once; and as to Dain?"

"You get him away as you can best. This is a great trouble in my heart," sighed Lakamba.

Babalatchi got up, and, going close to his master, spoke earnestly.

"There is one of our praus at the southern mouth of the river. The Dutch warship is to the northward watching the main entrance. I shall send Dain off to-night in a canoe, by the hidden channels, on board the prau. His father is a great prince, and shall hear of our generosity. Let the prau take him to Ampanam. Your glory shall be great, and your reward in powerful friendship.

Almayer will no doubt deliver the dead body as Dain's to the officers, and the foolish white men shall say, 'This is very good; let there be peace.' And the trouble shall be removed from your heart, Rajah."

"True! true!" said Lakamba.

"And, this being accomplished by me who am your slave, you shall reward with a generous hand. That I know! The white man is grieving for the lost treasure, in the manner of white men who thirst after dollars. Now, when all other things are in order, we shall perhaps obtain the treasure from the white man. Dain must escape, and Almayer must live."

"Now go, Babalatchi!" said Lakamba, getting off his chair. "I am very sick, and want medicine. Tell the white chief so."

But Babalatchi was not to be got rid of in this summary manner. He knew that his master, after the manner of the great, liked to shift the burden of toil and danger on to his servant's shoulders, but in the difficult straits in which they were now the Rajah must play his part. He may be very sick for the white men, for all the world if he liked, as long as he would take upon himself the execution of part at least of Babalatchi's carefully thought-of plan. Babalatchi wanted a big canoe manned by twelve men to be sent out after dark towards Bulangi's clearing. Dain may have to be overpowered. A man in love cannot be expected to see clearly the path of safety if it leads him away from the object of his affections, argued Babalatchi, and in that case they would have to use force in order to make him go. Would the Rajah see that trusty men manned the canoe? The thing must be done secretly. Perhaps the Rajah would come himself, so as to bring all the weight of his authority to bear upon Dain if he should prove obstinate and refuse to leave his hiding-place. The Rajah would not commit himself to a definite promise, and anxiously pressed Babalatchi to go, being afraid of the white men paying him an unexpected visit. The aged statesman reluctantly took his leave and went into the courtyard.

Before going down to his boat Babalatchi stopped for a while in the big open space where the thick-leaved trees put black patches of shadow which seemed to float on a flood of smooth, intense light that rolled up to the houses, and down to the stockade and over the river, where it broke and sparkled in thousands of glittering wavelets, like a band woven of azure and gold edged with the brilliant green of the forests guarding both banks of the Pantai. In the perfect calm before the coming of the afternoon breeze the irregularly jagged line of tree-tops stood unchanging, as if traced by an unsteady hand on the clear blue of the hot sky. In the space sheltered by the high palisades there lingered the

smell of decaying blossoms from the surrounding forest, a taint of drying fish; with now and then a whiff of acrid smoke from the cooking fires when it eddied down from under the leafy boughs and clung lazily about the burnt-up grass.

As Babalatchi looked up at the flagstaff overtopping a group of low trees in the middle of the courtyard the tricolour flag of the Netherlands stirred slightly for the first time since it had been hoisted that morning on the arrival of the man-of-war boats. With a faint rustle of trees the breeze came down in light puffs, playing capriciously for a time with this emblem of Lakamba's power, that was also the mark of his servitude; then the breeze freshened in a sharp gust of wind, and the flag flew out straight and steady above the trees. A dark shadow ran along the river, rolling over and covering up the sparkle of declining sunlight. A big white cloud sailed slowly across the darkening sky, and hung to the westward as if waiting for the sun to join it there. Men and things shook off the torpor of the hot afternoon and stirred into life under the first breath of the sea breeze.

Babalatchi hurried down to the water-gate; yet before he passed through it he paused to look round the courtyard, with its light and shade, with its cheery fires, with the groups of Lakamba's soldiers and retainers scattered about. His own house stood amongst the other buildings in that enclosure, and the statesman of Sambir asked himself with a sinking heart when and how would it be given him to return to that house. He had to deal with a man more dangerous than any wild beast of his experience: a proud man, a man wilful after the manner of princes, a man in love. And he was going forth to speak to that man words of cold and worldly wisdom. Could anything be more appalling? What if that man should take umbrage at some fancied slight to his honour or disregard of his affections and suddenly "amok"? The wise adviser would be the first victim, no doubt, and death would be his reward. And underlying the horror of this situation there was the danger of those meddling fools, the white men. A vision of comfortless exile in far-off Madura rose up before Babalatchi. Wouldn't that be worse than death itself? And there was that half-white woman with threatening eyes. How could he tell what an incomprehensible creature of the sort would or would not do? She knew so much that she made the killing of Dain an impossibility. That much was certain. And yet the sharp, rough-edged kriss is a good and discreet friend, thought Babalatchi, as he examined his own lovingly, and put it back in the sheath, with a sigh of regret, before unfastening his canoe. As he cast off the painter, pushed out into the stream, and took up his paddle, he realized vividly how unsatisfactory it was to have women mixed

up in state affairs. Young women, of course. For Mrs. Almayer's mature wisdom, and for the easy aptitude in intrigue that comes with years to the feminine mind, he felt the most sincere respect.

He paddled leisurely, letting the canoe drift down as he crossed towards the point. The sun was high yet, and nothing pressed. His work would commence only with the coming of darkness. Avoiding the Lingard jetty, he rounded the point, and paddled up the creek at the back of Almayer's house. There were many canoes lying there, their noses all drawn together, fastened all to the same stake. Babalatchi pushed his little craft in amongst them and stepped on shore. On the other side of the ditch something moved in the grass.

"Who's that hiding?" hailed Babalatchi. "Come out and speak to me."

Nobody answered. Babalatchi crossed over, passing from boat to boat, and poked his staff viciously in the suspicious place. Taminah jumped up with a cry.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, surprised. "I have nearly stepped on your tray. Am I a Dyak that you should hide at my sight?"

"I was weary, and—I slept," whispered Taminah, confusedly.

"You slept! You have not sold anything to-day, and you will be beaten when you return home," said Babalatchi.

Taminah stood before him abashed and silent. Babalatchi looked her over carefully with great satisfaction. Decidedly he would offer fifty dollars more to that thief Bulangi. The girl pleased him.

"Now you go home. It is late," he said sharply. "Tell Bulangi that I shall be near his house before the night is half over, and that I want him to make all things ready for a long journey. You understand? A long journey to the southward. Tell him that before sunset, and do not forget my words."

Taminah made a gesture of assent, and watched Babalatchi recross the ditch and disappear through the bushes bordering Almayer's compound. She moved a little further off the creek and sank in the grass again, lying down on her face, shivering in dry-eyed misery.

Babalatchi walked straight towards the cooking-shed looking for Mrs. Almayer. The courtyard was in a great uproar. A strange Chinaman had possession of the kitchen fire and was noisily demanding another saucepan. He hurled objurgations, in the Canton dialect and bad Malay, against the group of slave-girls standing a little way off, half frightened, half amused, at his violence. From the camping fires round which the seamen of the frigate were sitting came words of encouragement, mingled with

laughter and jeering. In the midst of this noise and confusion Babalatchi met Ali, an empty dish in his hand.

"Where are the white men?" asked Babalatchi.

"They are eating in the front verandah," answered Ali. "Do not stop me, Tuan. I am giving the white men their food and am busy."

"Where's Mem Almayer?"

"Inside the passage. She is listening to the talk."

Ali grinned and passed on; Babalatchi ascended the plankway to the rear verandah, and beckoning out Mrs. Almayer, engaged her in earnest conversation. Through the long passage, closed at the further end by the red curtain, they could hear from time to time Almayer's voice mingling in conversation with an abrupt loudness that made Mrs. Almayer look significantly at Babalatchi.

"Listen," she said. "He has drunk much."

"He has," whispered Babalatchi. "He will sleep heavily to-night."

Mrs. Almayer looked doubtful.

"Sometimes the devil of strong gin makes him keep awake, and he walks up and down the verandah all night, cursing; then we stand afar off," explained Mrs. Almayer, with the fuller knowledge born of twenty odd years of married life.

"But then he does not hear, nor understand, and his hand, of course, has no strength. We do not want him to hear to-night."

"No," assented Mrs. Almayer, energetically, but in a cautiously subdued voice. "If he hears he will kill."

Babalatchi looked incredulous.

"Hai Tuan, you may believe me. Have I not lived many years with that man? Have I not seen death in that man's eyes more than once when I was younger and he guessed at many things. Had he been a man of my own people I would not have seen such a look twice; but he——"

With a contemptuous gesture she seemed to fling unutterable scorn on Almayer's weak-minded aversion to sudden bloodshed.

"If he has the wish but not the strength, then what do we fear?" asked Babalatchi, after a short silence during which they both listened to Almayer's loud talk till it subsided into the murmur of general conversation. "What do we fear?" repeated Babalatchi again.

"To keep the daughter whom he loves he would strike into your heart and mine without hesitation," said Mrs. Almayer. "When the girl is gone he will be like the devil unchained. Then you and I had better beware."

"I am an old man and fear not death," answered Babalatchi,

with a mendacious assumption of indifference. "But what will you do?"

"I am an old woman, and wish to live," retorted Mrs. Almayer. "She is my daughter also. I shall seek safety at the feet of our Rajah, speaking in the name of the past when we both were young, and he——"

Babalatchi raised his hand.

"Enough. You shall be protected," he said soothingly.

Again the sound of Almayer's voice was heard, and again interrupting their talk, they listened to the confused but loud utterance coming in bursts of unequal strength, with unexpected pauses and noisy repetitions that made some words and sentences fall clear and distinct on their ears out of the meaningless jumble of excited shoutings emphasized by the thumping of Almayer's fist upon the table. On the short intervals of silence, the high complaining note of tumblers, standing close together and vibrating to the shock, lingered, growing fainter, till it leapt up again into tumultuous ringing, when a new idea started a new rush of words and brought down the heavy hand again. At last the quarrelsome shouting ceased, and the thin plaint of disturbed glass died away into reluctant quietude.

Babalatchi and Mrs. Almayer had listened curiously, their bodies bent and their ears turned towards the passage. At every louder shout they nodded at each other with a ridiculous affectation of scandalized propriety, and they remained in the same attitude for some time after the noise had ceased.

"This is the devil of gin," whispered Mrs. Almayer. "Yes; he talks like that sometimes when there is nobody to hear him."

"What does he say?" inquired Babalatchi, eagerly. "You ought to understand."

"I have forgotten their talk. A little I understood. He spoke without any respect of the white ruler in Batavia, and of protection, and said he had been wronged; he said that several times. More I did not understand. Listen! Again he speaks!"

"Tse! tse! tse!" clicked Babalatchi, trying to appear shocked, but with a joyous twinkle of his solitary eye. "There will be great trouble between those white men. I will go round now and see. You tell your daughter that there is a sudden and a long journey before her, with much glory and splendour at the end. And tell her that Dain must go, or he must die, and that he will not go alone."

"No, he will not go alone," slowly repeated Mrs. Almayer, with a thoughtful air, as she crept into the passage after seeing Babalatchi disappear round the corner of the house.

The statesman of Sambir, under the impulse of vivid curiosity,

made his way quickly to the front of the house, but once there he moved slowly and cautiously as he crept step by step up the stairs of the verandah. On the highest step he sat down quietly, his feet on the steps below, ready for flight should his presence prove unwelcome. He felt pretty safe so. The table stood nearly endways to him, and he saw Almayer's back; at Nina he looked full face, and had a side view of both officers; but of the four persons sitting at the table only Nina and the younger officer noticed his noiseless arrival. The momentary dropping of Nina's eyelids acknowledged Babalatchi's presence; she then spoke at once to the young sub, who turned towards her with attentive alacrity, but her gaze was fastened steadily on her father's face while Almayer was speaking uproariously.

"... disloyalty and unscrupulousness! What have you ever done to make me loyal? You have no grip on this country. I had to take care of myself, and when I asked for protection I was met with threats and contempt, and had Arab slander thrown in my face. I! a white man!"

"Don't be violent, Almayer," remonstrated the lieutenant; "I have heard all this already."

"Then why do you talk to me about scruples? I wanted money, and I gave powder in exchange. How could I know that some of your wretched men were going to be blown up? Scruples! Pah!"

He groped unsteadily amongst the bottles, trying one after another, grumbling to himself the while. "No more wine," he muttered discontentedly.

"You have had enough, Almayer," said the lieutenant, as he lighted a cigar. "Is it not time to deliver to us your prisoner? I take it you have that Dain Maroola stowed away safely somewhere. Still we had better get that business over, and then we shall have more drink. Come! don't look at me like this."

Almayer was staring with stony eyes, his trembling fingers fumbling about his throat.

"Gold," he said with difficulty. "Hem! A hand on the windpipe, you know. Sure you will excuse. I wanted to say—a little gold for a little powder. What's that?"

"I know, I know," said the lieutenant soothingly.

"No! You don't know. Not one of you knows!" shouted Almayer. "The government is a fool, I tell you. Heaps of gold. I am the man that knows; I and another one. But he won't speak. He is——"

He checked himself with a feeble smile, and, making an unsuccessful attempt to pat the officer on the shoulder, knocked over a couple of empty bottles.

"Personally you are a fine fellow," he said very distinctly, in a

patronizing manner. His head nodded drowsily as he sat muttering to himself.

The two officers looked at each other helplessly.

"This won't do," said the lieutenant, addressing his junior. "Have the men mustered in the compound here. I must get some sense out of him. Hi! Almayer! Wake up, man. Redeem your word. You gave your word. You gave your word of honour, you know."

Almayer shook off the officer's hand with impatience, but his ill-humour vanished at once, and he looked up, putting his forefinger to the side of his nose.

"You are very young; there is time for all things," he said, with an air of great sagacity.

The lieutenant turned towards Nina, who, leaning back in her chair, watched her father steadily.

"Really I am very much distressed by all this for your sake," he exclaimed. "I do not know," he went on, speaking with some embarrassment, "whether I have any right to ask you anything, unless, perhaps, to withdraw from this painful scene, but I feel that I must—for your father's good—suggest that you should—I mean if you have any influence over him you ought to exert it now to make him keep the promise he gave me before he—before he got into this state."

He observed with discouragement that she seemed not to take any notice of what he said, sitting still with half-closed eyes.

"I trust——" he began again.

"What is the promise you speak of?" abruptly asked Nina, leaving her seat and moving towards her father.

"Nothing that is not just and proper. He promised to deliver to us a man who in time of profound peace took the lives of innocent men to escape the punishment he deserved for breaking the law. He planned his mischief on a large scale. It is not his fault if it failed, partially. Of course you have heard of Dain Maroola. Your father secured him, I understand. We know he escaped up this river. Perhaps you——"

"And he killed white men!" interrupted Nina.

"I regret to say they were white. Yes, two white men lost their lives through that scoundrel's freak."

"Two only!" exclaimed Nina.

The officer looked at her in amazement.

"Why! why! You——" he stammered, confused.

"There might have been more," interrupted Nina. "And when you get this—this scoundrel, will you go?"

The lieutenant, still speechless, bowed his assent.

"Then I would get him for you if I had to seek him in a burning

fire," she burst out with intense energy. "I hate the sight of your white faces. I hate the sound of your gentle voices. That is the way you speak to women, dropping sweet words before any pretty face. I have heard your voices before. I hoped to live here without seeing any other white face but this," she added in a gentler tone, touching lightly her father's cheek.

Almayer ceased his mumbling and opened his eyes. He caught hold of his daughter's hand and pressed it to his face, while Nina with the other hand smoothed his rumpled grey hair, looking defiantly over her father's head at the officer, who had now regained his composure and returned her look with a cool, steady stare. Below, in front of the verandah, they could hear the tramp of seamen mustering there according to orders. The sub-lieutenant came up the steps, while Babalatchi stood up uneasily and, with finger on lip, tried to catch Nina's eye.

"You are a good girl," whispered Almayer, absently, dropping his daughter's hand.

"Father! father!" she cried, bending over him with passionate entreaty. "See those two men looking at us. Send them away. I cannot bear it any more. Send them away. Do what they want and let them go."

She caught sight of Babalatchi and ceased speaking suddenly, but her foot tapped the floor with rapid beats in a paroxysm of nervous restlessness. The two officers stood close together looking on curiously.

"What has happened? What is the matter?" whispered the younger man.

"Don't know," answered the other, under his breath. "One is furious, and the other is drunk. Not so drunk, either. Queer this. Look!"

Almayer had risen, holding on to his daughter's arm. He hesitated a moment, then he let go his hold and lurched half-way across the verandah. There he pulled himself together, and stood very straight, breathing hard and glaring round angrily.

"Are the men ready?" asked the lieutenant.

"All ready, sir."

"Now, Mr. Almayer, lead the way," said the lieutenant.

Almayer rested his eyes on him as if he saw him for the first time.

"Two men," he said thickly. The effort of speaking seemed to interfere with his equilibrium. He took a quick step to save himself from a fall, and remained swaying backwards and forwards. "Two men," he began again, speaking with difficulty. "Two white men—men in uniform—honourable men. I want to say—men of honour. Are you?"

"Come! None of that," said the officer impatiently. "Let us have that friend of yours."

"What do you think I am?" asked Almayer, fiercely.

"You are drunk, but not so drunk as not to know what you are doing. Enough of this tomfoolery," said the officer sternly, "or I will have you put under arrest in your own house."

"Arrest!" laughed Almayer, discordantly. "Ha! ha! ha! Arrest! Why, I have been trying to get out of this infernal place for twenty years, and I can't. You hear, man! I can't, and never shall! Never!"

He ended his words with a sob, and walked unsteadily down the stairs. When in the courtyard the lieutenant approached him, and took him by the arm. The sub-lieutenant and Babalatchi followed close.

"That's better, Almayer," said the officer encouragingly. "Where are you going to? There are only planks there. Here," he went on, shaking him slightly, "do we want the boats?"

"No," answered Almayer, viciously. "You want a grave."

"What? Wild again! Try to talk sense."

"Grave!" roared Almayer, struggling to get himself free. "A hole in the ground. Don't you understand? You must be drunk. Let me go! Let go, I tell you!"

He tore away from the officer's grasp, and reeled towards the planks where the body lay under its white cover; then he turned round quickly, and faced the semicircle of interested faces. The sun was sinking rapidly, throwing long shadows of house and trees over the courtyard, but the light lingered yet on the river, where the logs went drifting past in midstream. Looking very distinct, and black in the pale red glow. The trunks of the trees in the forest on the east bank were lost in gloom while their highest branches swayed gently in the departing sunlight. The air felt heavy and cold in the breeze, expiring in slight puffs that came over the water.

Almayer shivered as he made an effort to speak, and again with an uncertain gesture he seemed to free his throat from the grip of an invisible hand. His bloodshot eyes wandered aimlessly from face to face.

"There!" he said at last. "Are you all there? He is a dangerous man."

He dragged at the cover with hasty violence, and the body rolled stiffly off the planks and fell at his feet in rigid helplessness.

"Cold, perfectly cold," said Almayer, looking round with a mirthless smile. "Sorry can do no better. And you can't hang him, either. As you observe, gentlemen," he added gravely, "there is no head, and hardly any neck."

The last ray of light was snatched away from the tree-tops, the river grew suddenly dark, and in the great stillness the murmur of the flowing water seemed to fill the vast expanse of grey shadow that descended upon the land.

"This is Dain," went on Almayer to the silent group that surrounded him. "And I have kept my word. First one hope, then another, and this is my last. Nothing is left now. You think there is one dead man here? Mistake, I 'sure you. I am much more dead. Why don't you hang me?" he suggested suddenly, in a friendly tone, addressing the lieutenant. "I assure, assure you it would be a mat—matter of form *altog*—altogether."

These last words he muttered to himself, and walked zigzagging towards his house. "Get out!" he thundered at Ali, who was approaching timidly with offers of assistance. From afar, scared groups of men and women watched his devious progress. He dragged himself up the stairs by the banister, and managed to reach a chair into which he fell heavily. He sat for a while panting with exertion and anger, and looking round vaguely for Nina; then making a threatening gesture towards the compound, where he had heard Babalatchi's voice, he overturned the table with his foot in a great crash of smashed crockery. He muttered yet menacingly to himself, then his head fell on his breast, his eyes closed, and with a deep sigh he fell asleep.

That night—for the first time in its history—the peaceful and flourishing settlement of Sambir saw the lights shining about "Almayer's Folly." These were the lanterns of the boats hung up by the seamen under the verandah where the two officers were holding a court of inquiry into the truth of the story related to them by Babalatchi. Babalatchi had regained all his importance. He was eloquent and persuasive, calling Heaven and Earth to witness the truth of his statements. There were also other witnesses. Mahmat Banjer and a good many others underwent a close examination that dragged its weary length far into the evening. A messenger was sent for Abdulla, who excused himself from coming on the score of his venerable age, but sent Reshid. Mahmat had to produce the bangle, and saw with rage and mortification the lieutenant put it in his pocket as one of the proofs of Dain's death, to be sent in with the official report of the mission. Babalatchi's ring was also impounded for the same purpose, but the experienced statesman was resigned to that loss from the very beginning. He did not mind as long as he was sure that the white men believed. He put that question to himself earnestly as he left, one of the last, when the proceedings came to a close. He was not certain. Still, if they believed only for a night, he would put Dain beyond their reach and feel safe him-

self. He walked away fast, looking from time to time over his shoulder in the fear of being followed, but he saw and heard nothing.

"Ten o'clock," said the lieutenant, looking at his watch and yawning. "I shall hear some of the captain's complimentary remarks when we get back. Miserable business, this."

"Do you think all this is true?" asked the younger man.

"True! It is just possible. But if it isn't true what can we do? If we had a dozen boats we could patrol the creeks; and that wouldn't be much good. That drunken madman was right; we haven't enough hold on this coast. They do what they like. Are our hammocks slung?"

"Yes, I told the coxswain. Strange couple over there," said the sub with a wave of his hand towards Almayer's house.

"Hem! Queer, certainly. What have you been telling her? I was attending to the father most of the time."

"I assure you I have been perfectly civil," protested the other warily.

"All right. Don't get excited. She objects to civility, then, from what I understand. I thought you might have been tender. You know we are on service."

"Well, of course. Never forget that. Coldly civil. That's all."

They both laughed a little, and not feeling sleepy began to pace the verandah side by side. The moon rose stealthily above the trees, and suddenly changed the river into a stream of scintillating silver. The forest came out of the black void and stood sombre and pensive over the sparkling water. The breeze died away into a breathless calm.

Seamanlike, the two officers tramped measuredly up and down without exchanging a word. The loose planks rattled rhythmically under their steps with obtrusive dry sound in the perfect silence of the night. As they were wheeling round again the younger man stood attentive.

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

"No!" said the other. "Hear what?"

"I thought I heard a cry. Ever so faint. Seemed a woman's voice. In that other house. Ah! Again! Hear it?"

"No," said the lieutenant, after listening a while. "You young fellows always hear women's voices. If you are going to dream you had better get into your hammock. Good-night."

The moon mounted higher, and the warm shadows grew smaller and crept away as if hiding before the cold and cruel light.

"IT HAS set at last," said Nina to her mother pointing towards the hills behind which the sun had sunk. "Listen, mother, I am going now to Bulangi's creek, and if I should never return——"

She interrupted herself, and something like doubt dimmed for a moment the fire of suppressed exaltation that had glowed in her eyes and had illuminated the serene impassiveness of her features with a ray of eager life during all that long day of excitement—the day of joy and anxiety, of hope and terror, of vague grief and indistinct delight. While the sun shone with that dazzling light in which her love was born and grew till it possessed her whole being, she was kept firm in her unwavering resolve by the mysterious whisperings of desire which filled her heart with impatient longing for the darkness that would mean the end of danger and strife, the beginning of happiness, the fulfilling of love, the completeness of life. It had set at last! The short tropical twilight went out before she could draw the long breath of relief; and now the sudden darkness seemed to be full of menacing voices calling upon her to rush headlong into the unknown; to be true to her own impulses to give herself up to the passion she had evoked and shared. He was waiting! In the solitude of the secluded clearing, in the vast silence of the forest he was waiting alone, a fugitive in fear of his life. Indifferent to his danger he was waiting for her. It was for her only that he had come; and now as the time approached when he should have his reward, she asked herself with dismay what meant that chilling doubt of her own will and of her own desire? With an effort she shook off the fear of the passing weakness. He should have his reward. Her woman's love and her woman's honour overcame the faltering distrust of that unknown future waiting for her in the darkness of the river.

"No, you will not return," muttered Mrs. Almayer, prophetically. "Without you he will not go, and if he remains here——" She waved her hand towards the lights of "Almayer's Folly," and the unfinished sentence died out in a threatening murmur.

The two women had met behind the house, and now were walking slowly together towards the creek where all the canoes were moored. Arrived at the fringe of bushes they stopped by a common impulse, and Mrs. Almayer, laying her hand on her daughter's arm, tried in vain to look close into the girl's averted face. When she attempted to speak her first words were lost in a

stified sob that sounded strangely coming from that woman who, of all human passions, seemed to know only those of anger and hate.

"You are going away to be a great Ranee," she said at last, in a voice that was steady enough now, "and if you be wise you shall have much power that will endure many days, and even last into your old age. What have I been? A slave all my life, and I have cooked rice for a man who had no courage and no wisdom. Hai! I! even I, was given in gift by a chief and a warrior to a man that was neitl'at. Hai! Hai!"

She wailed to herself softly, lamenting the lost possibilities of murder and mischief that could have fallen to her lot had she been mated with a congenial spirit. Nina bent down over Mrs. Almayer's slight form and scanned attentively, under the stars that had rushed out on the black sky and now hung breathless over that strange parting, her mother's shrivelled features, and looked close into the sunken eyes that could see into her own dark future by the light of a long and a painful experience. Again she felt herself fascinated, as of old, by her mother's exalted mood and by the oracular certainty of expression which, together with her fits of violence, had contributed not a little to the reputation for witchcraft she enjoyed in the settlement.

"I was a slave, and you shall be a queen," went on Mrs. Almayer, looking straight before her; "but remember men's strength and their weakness. Tremble before his anger, so that he may see your fear in the light of day; but in your heart you may laugh, for after sunset he is your slave."

"A slave! He! The master of life! You do not know him, mother."

Mrs. Almayer condescended to laugh contemptuously.

"You speak like a fool of a white woman," she exclaimed. "What do you know of men's anger and of men's love? Have you watched the sleep of men weary of dealing death? Have you felt about you the strong arm that could drive a kriss deep into a beating heart? Yah! you are a white woman, and ought to pray to a woman god!"

"Why do you say this? I have listened to your words so long that I have forgotten my old life. If I was white would I stand here, ready to go? Mother, I shall return to the house and look once more at my father's face."

"No!" said Mrs. Almayer, violently. "No, he sleeps now the sleep of gin; and if you went back he might awake and see you. No, he shall never see you. When the terrible old man took you away from me when you were little, you remember——"

"It was such a long time ago," murmured Nina.

"I remember," went on Mrs. Almayer, fiercely. "I wanted to look at your face again. He said no! I heard you cry and jumped into the river. You were his daughter then; you are my daughter now. Never shall you go back to that house; you shall never cross this courtyard again. No! no!"

Her voice rose almost to a shout. On the other side of the creek there was a rustle in the long grass. The two women heard it, and listened for a while in startled silence.

"I shall go," said Nina, in a cautious but intense whisper. "What is your hate or your revenge to me?"

She moved towards the house, Mrs. Almayer clinging to her and trying to pull her back.

"Stop, you shall not go!" she gasped.

Nina pushed away her mother impatiently and gathered up her skirts for a quick run, but Mrs. Almayer ran forward and turned round, facing her daughter with outstretched arms.

"If you move another step," she exclaimed, breathing quickly, "I shall cry out. Do you see those lights in the big house? There sit two white men, angry because they cannot have the blood of the man you love. And in those dark houses," she continued, more calmly as she pointed towards the settlement, "my voice could wake up men that would lead the Orang Blanda soldiers to him who is waiting—for you."

She could not see her daughter's face, but the white figure before her stood silent and irresolute in the darkness. Mrs. Almayer pursued her advantage.

"Give up your old life! Forget!" she said in entreating tones. "Forget that you ever looked at a white face; forget their words; forget their thoughts. They speak lies. And they think lies because they despise us that are better than they are, but not so strong. Forget their friendship and their contempt; forget their many gods. Girl, why do you want to remember the past when there is a warrior and a chief ready to give many lives—his own life—for one of your smiles?"

While she spoke she pushed gently her daughter towards the canoes, hiding her own fear, anxiety, and doubt under the flood of passionate words that left Nina no time to think and no opportunity to protest, even if she had wished it. But she did not wish it now. At the bottom of that passing desire to look again at her father's face there was no strong affection. She felt no scruples and no remorse at leaving suddenly that man whose sentiment towards herself she could not understand, she could not even see. There was only an instinctive clinging to old life, to old habits, to old faces; that fear of finality which lurks in every human

breast and prevents so many heroisms and so many crimes. For years she had stood between her mother and her father, the one so strong in her weakness, the other so weak where he could have been strong. Between those two beings so dissimilar, so antagonistic, she stood with mute heart wondering and angry at the fact of her own existence. It seemed so unreasonable, so humiliating to be flung there in the settlement and to see the days rush by into the past, without a hope, a desire, or an aim that would justify the life she had to endure in ever-growing weariness. She had little belief and no sympathy for her father's dreams; but the savage ravings of her mother chanced to strike a responsive chord, deep down somewhere in her despairing heart; and she dreamed dreams of her own with the persistent absorption of a captive thinking of liberty within the walls of his prison cell. With the coming of Dain she found the road to freedom by obeying the voice of the new-born impulses, and with surprised joy she thought she could read in his eyes the answer to all the questionings of her heart. She understood now the reason and the aim of life; and in the triumphant unveiling of that mystery she threw away disdainfully her past with its sad thoughts, its bitter feelings and its faint affections, now withered and dead in contact with her fierce passion.

Mrs. Almayer unmoored Nina's own canoe and, straightening herself painfully, stood, painter in hand, looking at her daughter.

"Quick," she said; "get away before the moon rises, while the river is dark. I am afraid of Abdulla's slaves. The wretches prowl in the night often, and might see and follow you. There are two paddles in the canoe."

Nina approached her mother and touched lightly with her lips the wrinkled forehead. Mrs. Almayer snorted contemptuously in protest against that tenderness which she, nevertheless, feared could be contagious.

"Shall I ever see you again, mother?" murmured Nina.

"No," said Mrs. Almayer, after a short silence. "Why should you return here where it is my fate to die? You will live far away in splendour and might. When I hear of white men driven from the islands, then I shall know that you are alive, and that you remember my words."

"I shall always remember," returned Nina, earnestly; "but where is my power, and what can I do?"

"Do not let him look too long in your eyes, nor lay his head on your knees without reminding him that men should fight before they rest. And if he lingers, give him his kriss yourself and bid him go, as the wife of a mighty prince should do when the enemies are near. Let him slay the white men that come to us to trade,

with prayers on their lips and loaded guns in their hands. Ah"—she ended with a sigh—"they are on every sea, and on every shore; and they are very many!"

She swung the bow of the canoe towards the river, but did not let go the gunwale, keeping her hand on it in irresolute thoughtfulness. Nina put the point of the paddle against the bank, ready to shove off into the stream.

"What is it, mother?" she asked, in a low voice. "Do you hear anything?"

"No," said Mrs. Almayer, absently. "Listen, Nina," she continued, abruptly, after a slight pause, "in after years there will be other women——"

A stifled cry in the boat interrupted her, and the paddle rattled in the canoe as it slipped from Nina's hands, which she put out in a protesting gesture. Mrs. Almayer fell on her knees on the bank and leaned over the gunwale so as to bring her own face close to her daughter's.

"There will be other women," she repeated firmly; "I tell you that, because you are half white, and may forget that he is a great chief, and that such things must be. Hide your anger, and do not let him see on your face the pain that will eat your heart. Meet him with joy in your eyes and wisdom on your lips, for to you he will turn in sadness or in doubt. As long as he looks upon many women your power will last, but should there be one, one only with whom he seems to forget you, then——"

"I could not live," exclaimed Nina, covering her face with both her hands. "Do not speak so, mother; it could not be."

"Then," went on Mrs. Almayer, steadily, "to that woman, Nina, show no mercy."

She moved the canoe down towards the stream by the gunwale, and gripped it with both her hands, the bow pointing into the river.

"Are you crying?" she asked sternly of her daughter, who sat still with covered face. "Arise, and take your paddle, for he has waited long enough. And remember, Nina, no mercy; and if you must strike, strike with a steady hand."—

She put out all her strength, and swinging her body over the water, shot the light craft far into the stream. When she recovered herself from the effort she tried vainly to catch a glimpse of the canoe that seemed to have dissolved suddenly into the white mist trailing over the heated waters of the Pantai. After listening for a while intently on her knees, Mrs. Almayer rose with a deep sigh, while two tears wandered slowly down her withered cheeks. She wiped them off quickly with a wisp of her grey hair as if ashamed of herself, but could not stifle another loud sigh, for her

heart was heavy and she suffered much, being unused to tender emotions.

This time she fancied she had heard a faint noise, like the echo of her own sigh, and she stopped, straining her ears to catch the slightest sound, and peering apprehensively towards the bushes near her.

"Who is there?" she asked, in an unsteady voice, while her imagination peopled the solitude of the riverside with ghost-like forms. "Who is there?" she repeated faintly.

There was no answer: only the voice of the river murmuring in sad monotone behind the white veil seemed to swell louder for a moment, to die away again in a soft whisper of eddies washing against the bank.

Mrs. Almayer shook her head as if in answer to her own thoughts, and walked quickly away from the bushes, looking to the right and left watchfully. She went straight towards the cooking-shed, observing that the embers of the fire there glowed more brightly than usual, as if somebody had been adding fresh fuel to the fires, during the evening. As she approached, Babalatchi, who had been squatting in the warm glow, rose and met her in the shadow outside.

"Is she gone?" asked the anxious statesman, hastily.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Almayer. "What are the white men doing? When did you leave them?"

"They are sleeping now, I think. May they never wake!" exclaimed Babalatchi, fervently. "Oh! but they are devils, and made much talk and trouble over that carcass. The chief threatened me twice with his hand, and said he would have me tied up to a tree. Tie me up to a tree! Me!" he repeated, striking his breast violently.

Mrs. Almayer laughed tauntingly.

"And you salaamed and asked for mercy. Men with arms by their side acted otherwise when I was young."

"And where are they, the men of your youth? You mad woman!" retorted Babalatchi, angrily. "Killed by the Dutch. Aha! But I shall live to deceive them. A man knows when to fight and when to tell peaceful lies. You would know that if you were not a woman."

But Mrs. Almayer did not seem to hear him. With bent body and outstretched arm she appeared to be listening to some noise behind the shed.

"There are strange sounds," she whispered, with evident alarm. "I have heard in the air the sounds of grief, as of a sigh and weeping. That was by the riverside. And now again I heard——"

"Where?" asked Babalatchi, in an altered voice. "What did you hear?"

"Close here. It was like a breath long drawn. I wish I had burnt the paper over the body before it was buried."

"Yes," assented Babalatchi. "But the white men had him thrown into a hole at once. You know he found his death on the river," he added cheerfully, "and his ghost may hail the canoes, but would leave the land alone."

Mrs. Almayer, who had been craning her neck to look round the corner of the shed, drew back her head.

"There is nobody there," she said, reassured. "Is it not time for the Rajah war-canoe to go to the clearing?"

"I have been waiting for it here, for I myself must go," explained Babalatchi. "I think I will go over and see what makes them late. When will you come? The Rajah gives you refuge."

"I shall paddle over before the break of day. I cannot leave my dollars behind," muttered Mrs. Almayer.

They separated. Babalatchi crossed the courtyard towards the creek to get his canoe, and Mrs. Almayer walked slowly to the house, ascended the plankway, and passing through the back verandah entered the passage leading to the front of the house; but before going in she turned in the doorway and looked back at the empty and silent courtyard, now lit up by the rays of the rising moon. No sooner she had disappeared, however, than a vague shape flitted out from amongst the stalks of the banana plantation, darted over the moonlit space, and fell in the darkness at the foot of the verandah. It might have been the shadow of a driving cloud, so noiseless and rapid was its passage, but for the trail of disturbed grass, whose feathery heads trembled and swayed for a long time in the moonlight before they rested motionless and gleaming, like a design of silver sprays embroidered on a sombre background.

Mrs. Almayer lighted the cocoanut lamp, and lifting cautiously the red curtain, gazed upon her husband, shading the light with her hand. Almayer, huddled up in the chair, one of his arms hanging down, the other thrown across the lower part of his face as if to ward off an invisible enemy, his legs stretched straight out, slept heavily, unconscious of the unfriendly eyes that looked upon him in disparaging criticism. At his feet lay the overturned table, amongst a wreck of crockery and broken bottles. The appearance as of traces left by a desperate struggle was accentuated by the chairs, which seemed to have been scattered violently all over the place, and now lay about the verandah with a lamentable aspect of inebriety in their helpless attitudes. Only Nina's big rocking-chair, standing black and motionless on its high runners,

towered above the chaos of demoralized furniture, unflinchingly dignified and patient, waiting for its burden.

With a last scornful look towards the sleeper, Mrs. Almayer passed behind the curtain into her own room. A couple of bats, encouraged by the darkness and the peaceful state of affairs, resumed their silent and oblique gambols above Almayer's head, and for a long time the profound quiet of the house was unbroken, save for the deep breathing of the sleeping man and the faint tinkle of silver in the hands of the woman preparing for flight. In the increasing light of the moon that had risen now above the night mist, the objects on the verandah came out strongly outlined in black splashes of shadow with all the uncompromising ugliness of their disorder, and a caricature of the sleeping Almayer appeared on the dirty whitewash of the wall behind him in a grotesquely exaggerated detail of attitude and feature enlarged to a heroic size. The discontented bats departed in quest of darker places, and a lizard came out in short, nervous rushes, and, pleased with the white table-cloth, stopped on it in breathless immobility that would have suggested sudden death had it not been for the melodious call he exchanged with a less adventurous friend hiding amongst the lumber in the courtyard. Then the boards in the passage creaked, the lizard vanished, and Almayer stirred uneasily with a sigh: slowly, out of the senseless annihilation of drunken sleep, he was returning, through the land of dreams, to waking consciousness. Almayer's head rolled from shoulder to shoulder in the oppression of his dreams; the heavens had descended upon him like a heavy mantle, and trailed in starred folds far under him. Stars above, stars all round him; and from the stars under his feet rose a whisper full of entreaties and tears, and sorrowful faces flitted amongst the clusters of light filling the infinite space below. How escape from the importunity of lamentable cries and from the look of staring, sad eyes in the faces which pressed round him till he gasped for breath under the crushing weight of worlds that hung over his aching shoulders? Get away! But how? If he attempted to move he would step off into nothing, and perish in the crashing fall of that universe of which he was the only support. And what were the voices saying? Urging him to move! Why? Move to destruction! Not likely! The absurdity of the thing filled him with indignation. He got a firmer foothold and stiffened his muscles in heroic resolve to carry his burden to all eternity. And ages passed in the superhuman labour, amidst the rush of circling worlds; in the plaintive murmur of sorrowful voices urging him to desist before it was too late—till the mysterious power that laid upon him the giant task seemed at last to seek his destruction. With terror he felt an

irresistible hand shaking him by the shoulder, while the chorus of voices swelled louder into an agonized prayer to go, go before it is too late. He felt himself slipping, losing his balance, as something dragged at his legs, and he fell. With a faint cry he glided out of the anguish of perishing creation into an imperfect waking that seemed to be still under the spell of his dream.

"What? What?" he murmured sleepily, without moving or opening his eyes. His head still felt heavy, and he had not the courage to raise his eyelids. In his ears there still lingered the sound of entreating whisper.—"Am I awake?—Why do I hear the voices?" he argued to himself, hazily.—"I cannot get rid of the horrible nightmare yet.—I have been very drunk.—What is that shaking me? I am dreaming yet.—I must open my eyes and be done with it. I am only half awake, it is evident."

He made an effort to shake off his stupor and saw a face close to his, glaring at him with staring eyeballs. He closed his eyes again in amazed horror and sat up straight in the chair, trembling in every limb. What was this apparition?—His own fancy, no doubt.—His nerves had been much tried the day before—and then the drink! He would not see it again if he had the courage to look.—He would look directly.—Get a little steadier first.—So.—Now.

He looked. The figure of a woman standing in the steely light, her hands stretched forth in a suppliant gesture, confronted him from the far-off end of the verandah; and in the space between him and the obstinate phantom floated the murmur of words that fell on his ears in a jumble of torturing sentences, the meaning of which escaped the utmost efforts of his brain. Who spoke the Malay words? Who ran away? Why too late—and too late for what? What meant those words of hate and love so mixed so strangely together, the ever-recurring names falling on his ears again and again—Nina, Dain; Dain, Nina? Dain was dead, and Nina was sleeping, unaware of the terrible experience through which he was now passing. Was he going to be tormented for ever, sleeping or waking, and have no peace either night or day? What was the meaning of this?

He shouted the last words aloud. The shadowy woman seemed to shrink and recede a little from him towards the doorway, and there was a shriek. Exasperated by the incomprehensible nature of his torment, Almayer made a rush upon the apparition, which eluded his grasp, and he brought up heavily against the wall. Quick as lightning he turned round and pursued fiercely the mysterious figure fleeing from him with piercing shrieks that were like fuel to the flames of his anger. Over the furniture, round the overturned table, and now he had it cornered behind Nina's

chair. To the left, to the right they dodged, the chair rocking madly between them, she sending out shriek after shriek at every jolt, and he growling meaningless curses through his hard set teeth. Oh! the fiendish noise that split his head and seemed to choke his breath—It would kill him—It must be stopped! An insane desire to crush that yelling thing induced him to cast himself recklessly over the chair with a desperate grab, and they came down together in a cloud of dust amongst the splintered wood. The last shriek died out under him in a faint gurgle, and he had secured the relief of absolute silence.

He looked at the woman's face under him. A real woman. He knew her. By all that is wonderful! Taminah! He jumped up ashamed of his fury and stood perplexed, wiping his forehead. The girl struggled to a kneeling posture and embraced his legs in a frenzied prayer for mercy.

"Don't be afraid," he said, raising her. "I shall not hurt you. Why do you come to my house in the night? And if you had to come, why not go behind the curtain where the women sleep?"

"The place behind the curtain is empty," gasped Taminah, catching her breath between the words. "There are no women in your house any more, Tuan. I saw the old Mem go away before I tried to wake you. I did not want your women, I wanted you."

"Old Mem!" repeated Almayer. "Do you mean my wife?" She nodded her head.

"But of my daughter you are not afraid?" said Almayer.

"Have you not heard me?" she exclaimed. "Have I not spoken for a long time when you lay there with eyes half open? She is gone too."

"I was asleep. Can you not tell when a man is sleeping and when awake?"

"Sometimes," answered Taminah in a low voice; "sometimes the spirit lingers close to a sleeping body and may hear. I spoke a long time before I touched you, and I spoke softly for fear it would depart at a sudden noise and leave you sleeping for ever. I took you by the shoulder only when you began to mutter words I could not understand. Have you not heard, then, and do you know nothing?"

"Nothing of what you said. What is it? Tell again if you want me to know."

He took her by the shoulder and led her unresisting to the front of the verandah into a stronger light. She wrung her hands with such an appearance of grief that he began to be alarmed.

"Speak," he said. "You made noise enough to wake even

dead men. And yet nobody living came," he added to himself in an uneasy whisper. "Are you mute? Speak!" he repeated.

In a rush of words which broke out after a short struggle from her trembling lips she told him the tale of Nina's love and her own jealousy. Several times he looked angrily into her face and told her to be silent; but he could not stop the sounds that seemed to him to run out in a hot stream, swirl about his feet, and rise in scalding waves about him, higher, higher, drowning his heart, touching his lips with a feel of molten lead, blotting out his sight in scorching vapour, closing over his head, merciless and deadly. When she spoke of the deception as to Dain's death of which he had been the victim only that day, he glanced again at her with terrible eyes, and made her falter for a second, but he turned away directly, and his face suddenly lost all expression in a stony stare far away over the river. Ah! the river! His old friend and his old enemy, speaking always with the same voice as he runs from year to year bringing fortune or disappointment, happiness or pain, upon the same varying but unchanged surface of glancing currents and swirling eddies. For many years he had listened to the passionless and soothing murmur that sometimes was the song of hope, at times the song of triumph, of encouragement; more often the whisper of consolation that spoke of better days to come. For so many years! So many years! And now to the accompaniment of that murmur he listened to the slow and painful beating of his heart. He listened attentively, wondering at the regularity of its beats. He began to count mechanically. One, two. Why count? At the next beat it must stop. No heart could suffer so and beat so steadily for long. Those regular strokes as of a muffled hammer that rang in his ears must stop soon. Still beating unceasing and cruel. No man can bear this: and is this the last, or will the next one be the last?—How much longer? O God! how much longer? His hand weighed heavier unconsciously on the girl's shoulder, and she spoke the last words of her story crouching at his feet with tears of pain and shame and anger. Was her revenge to fail her? This white man was like a senseless stone. Too late! Too late! —

"And you saw her go?" Almayer's voice sounded harshly above her head.

"Did I not tell you?" she sobbed, trying to wriggle gently out from under his grip. "Did I not tell you that I saw the witchwoman push the canoe? I lay hidden in the grass and heard all the words. She that we used to call the white Mem wanted to return to look at your face, but the witchwoman forbade her, and——"

She sank lower yet on her elbow, turning half round under the

downward push of the heavy hand, her face lifted up to him with spiteful eyes.

"And she obeyed," she shouted out in a half-laugh, half-cry of pain. "Let me go, Tuan. Why are you angry with me? Hasten, or you will be too late to show your anger to the deceitful woman."

Almayer dragged her up to her feet and looked close into her face while she struggled, turning her head away from his wild stare.

"Who sent you here to torment me?" he asked, violently. "I do not believe you. You lie."

He straightened his arm suddenly and flung her across the verandah towards the doorway, where she lay immobile and silent, as if she had left her life in his grasp, a dark heap, without a sound or a stir.

"Oh! Nina!" whispered Almayer, in a voice in which reproach and love spoke together in pained tenderness. "Oh! Nina! I do not believe."

A light draught from the river ran over the courtyard in a wave of bowing grass and, entering the verandah, touched Almayer's forehead with its cool breath, in a caress of infinite pity. The curtain in the women's doorway blew out and instantly collapsed with startling helplessness. He stared at the fluttering stuff.

"Nina!" cried Almayer. "Where are you, Nina?"

The wind passed out of the empty house in a tremulous sigh, and all was still.

Almayer hid his face in his hands as if to shut out a loathsome sight. When, hearing a slight rustle, he uncovered his eyes, the dark heap by the door was gone.

II

IN THE middle of a shadowless square of moonlight, shining on a smooth and level expanse of young rice-shoots, a little shelter-hut perched on high posts, the pile of brushwood near by and the glowing embers of a fire with a man stretched before it, seemed very small and as if lost in the pale green iridescences reflected from the ground. On three sides of the clearing, appearing very far away in the deceptive light, the big trees of the forest, lashed together with manifold bonds by a mass of tangled creepers, looked down at the growing young life at their feet with the sombre resignation of giants that had lost faith in their strength. And in the midst of them the merciless creepers clung to the big trunks

in cable-like coils, leaped from tree to tree, hung in thorny festoons from the lower boughs, and, sending slender tendrils on high to seek out the smallest branches, carried death to their victims in an exulting riot of silent destruction.

On the fourth side, following the curve of the bank of that branch of the Pantai that formed the only access to the clearing, ran a black line of young trees, bushes, and thick second growth, unbroken save for a small gap chopped out in one place. At that gap began the narrow footpath leading from the water's edge to the grass-built shelter used by the night watchers when the ripening crop had to be protected from the wild pigs. The path-way ended at the foot of the piles on which the hut was built, in a circular space covered with ashes and bits of burnt wood. In the middle of that space, by the dim fire, lay Dain.

He turned over on his side with an impatient sigh, and pillowing his head on his bent arm, lay quietly with his face to the dying fire. The glowing embers shone redly in a small circle, throwing a gleam into his wide-open eyes. His body was weary with the exertion of the past few days, his mind more weary still with the strain of solitary waiting for his fate. Never before had he felt so helpless. He had heard the report of the gun fired on board the launch, and he knew that his life was in untrustworthy hands, and that his enemies were very near.

During the slow hours of the afternoon he had roamed about on the edge of the forest, or, hiding in the bushes, watched the creek with unquiet eyes for some sign of danger. He feared not death, yet he desired ardently to live, for life to him was Nina. She had promised to come, to follow him, to share his danger and his splendour. But with her by his side he cared not for danger, and without her there could be no splendour and no joy in existence. Crouching in his shady hiding-place, he closed his eyes, trying to evoke the gracious and charming image of the white figure that for him was the beginning and the end of life. With eyes shut tight, his teeth hard set, he tried in a great effort of passionate will to keep his hold on that vision of supreme delight. In vain! His heart grew heavy as the figure of Nina faded away to be replaced by another vision this time—a vision of armed men, of angry faces, of glittering arms—and he seemed to hear the hum of excited and triumphant voices as they discovered him in his hiding-place. Startled by the vividness of his fancy, he would open his eyes, and, leaping out into the sunlight, resume his aimless wanderings around the clearing. As he skirted in his weary march the edge of the forest he glanced now and then into its dark shade, so enticing in its deceptive appearance of coolness, so repellent with its unrelieved gloom, where lay,

entombed and rotting, countless generations of trees, and where their successors stood as if mourning, in dark green foliage, immense and helpless, awaiting their turn. Only the parasites seemed to live there in a sinuous rush upwards into the air and sunshine, feeding on the dead and the dying alike, and crowning their victims with pink and blue flowers that gleamed amongst the boughs, incongruous and cruel, like a strident and mocking note in the solemn harmony of the doomed trees.

A man could hide there, thought Dain, as he approached a place where the creepers had been torn and hacked into an archway that might have been the beginning of a path. As he bent down to look through he heard angry grunting, and a sounder of wild pig crashed away in the undergrowth. An acrid smell of damp earth and of decaying leaves took him by the throat, and he drew back with a scared face, as if he had been touched by the breath of Death itself. The very air seemed dead in there—heavy and stagnating, poisoned with the corruption of countless ages. He went on, staggering on his way, urged by the nervous restlessness that made him feel tired yet caused him to loathe the very idea of immobility and repose. Was he a wild man to hide in the woods and perhaps be killed there—in the darkness—where there was no room to breathe? He would wait for his enemies in the sunlight, where he could see the sky and feel the breeze. He knew how a Malay chief should die. The sombre and desperate fury, that peculiar inheritance of his race, took possession of him, and he glared savagely across the clearing towards the gap in the bushes by the riverside. They would come from there. In imagination he saw them now. He saw the bearded faces and the white jackets of the officers, the light on the levelled barrels of the rifles. What is the bravery of the greatest warrior before the firearms in the hand of a slave? He would walk towards them with a smiling face, with his hands held out in a sign of submission till he was very near them. He would speak friendly words—come nearer yet—yet nearer—so near that they could touch him with their hands and stretch them out to make him a captive. That would be the time; with a shout and a leap he would be in the midst of them, kriss in hand, killing, killing, killing, and would die with the shouts of his enemies in his ears, their warm blood spurting before his eyes.

Carried away by his excitement, he snatched the kriss hidden in his sarong, and, drawing a long breath, rushed forward, struck at the empty air, and fell on his face. He lay as if stunned in the sudden reaction from his exaltation, thinking that, even if he died thus gloriously, it would have to be before he saw Nina. Better

so. If he saw her again he felt that death would be too terrible. With horror he, the descendant of Rajahs and of conquerors, had to face the doubt of his own bravery. His desire of life tormented him in a paroxysm of agonizing remorse. He had not the courage to stir a limb. He had lost faith in himself, and there was nothing else in him of what makes a man. The suffering remained, for it is ordered that it should abide in the human body even to the last breath, and fear remained. Dimly he could look into the depths of his passionate love, see its strength and its weakness, and felt afraid.

The sun went down slowly. The shadow of the western forest marched over the clearing, covered the man's scorched shoulders with its cool mantle, and went on hurriedly to mingle with the shadows of other forests on the eastern side. The sun lingered for a while amongst the light tracery of the higher branches, as if in friendly reluctance to abandon the body stretched in the green paddy-field. Then Dain, revived by the cool of the evening breeze, sat up and stared round him. As he did so the sun dipped sharply, as if ashamed of being detected in a sympathizing attitude, and the clearing, which during the day was all light, became suddenly all darkness, where the fire gleamed like an eye. Dain walked slowly towards the creek, and, divesting himself of his torn sarong, his only garment, entered the water cautiously. He had had nothing to eat that day, and had not dared show himself in daylight by the water-side to drink. Now, as he swam silently, he swallowed a few mouthfuls of water that lapped about his lips. This did him good, and he walked with greater confidence in himself and others as he returned towards the fire. Had he been betrayed by Lakamba all would have been over by this. He made up a big blaze, and while it lasted dried himself, and then lay down by the embers. He could not sleep, but he felt a great numbness in all his limbs. His restlessness was gone, and he was content to lie still, measuring the time by watching the stars that rose in endless succession above the forests, while the slight puffs of wind under the cloudless sky seemed to fan their twinkle into a greater brightness. Dreamily he assured himself over and over again that she would come, till the certitude crept into his heart and filled him with a great peace. Yes, when the next day broke, they would be together on the great blue sea that was like life—away from the forests that were like death. He murmured the name of Nina into the silent space with a tender smile: this seemed to break the spell of stillness, and far away by the creek a frog croaked loudly as if in answer. A chorus of loud roars and plaintive calls rose from the mud along the line of bushes. He laughed heartily; doubtless it was their love-song. He felt

affectionate towards the frogs and listened, pleased with the noisy life near him.

When the moon peeped above the trees he felt the old impatience and the old restlessness steal over him. Why was she so late? True, it was a long way to come with a single paddle. With what skill and what endurance could those small hands manage a heavy paddle! It was very wonderful—such small hands, such soft little palms that knew how to touch his cheek with a feel lighter than the fanning of a butterfly's wing. Wonderful! He lost himself lovingly in the contemplation of this tremendous mystery, and when he looked at the moon again it had risen a hand's breadth above the trees. Would she come? He forced himself to lie still, overcoming the impulse to rise and rush round the clearing again. He turned this way and that; at last, quivering with the effort, he lay on his back, and saw her face among the stars looking down on him.

The croaking of frogs suddenly ceased. With the watchfulness of a hunted man Dain sat up, listening anxiously, and heard several splashes in the water as the frogs took rapid headers into the creek. He knew that they had been alarmed by something, and stood up suspicious and attentive. A slight grating noise, then the dry sound as of two pieces of wood struck against each other. Somebody was about to land! He took up an armful of brushwood, and, without taking his eyes from the path, held it over the embers of his fire. He waited, undecided, and saw something gleam amongst the bushes; then a white figure came out of the shadows and seemed to float towards him in the pale light. His heart gave a great leap and stood still, then went on shaking his frame in furious beats. He dropped the brushwood upon the glowing coals, and had an impression of shouting her name—of rushing to meet her; yet he emitted no sound, he stirred not an inch, but he stood silent and motionless like chiselled bronze under the moonlight that streamed over his naked shoulders. As he stood still, fighting with his breath, as if bereft of his senses by the intensity of his delight, she walked up to him with quick, resolute steps, and, with the appearance of one about to leap from a dangerous height, threw both her arms round his neck with a sudden gesture. A small blue gleam crept amongst the dry branches, and the crackling of reviving fire was the only sound as they faced each other in the speechless emotion of that meeting; then the dry fuel caught at once, and a bright hot flame shot upwards in a blaze as high as their heads, and in its light they saw each other's eyes.

Neither of them spoke. He was regaining his senses in a slight tremor that ran upwards along his rigid body and hung about

his trembling lips. She drew back her head and fastened her eyes on his in one of those long looks that are a woman's most terrible weapon; a look that is more stirring than the closest touch, and more dangerous than the thrust of a dagger, because it also whips the soul out of the body, but leaves the body alive and helpless, to be swayed here and there by the capricious tempests of passion and desire; a look that enwraps the whole body, and that penetrates into the innermost recesses of the being, bringing terrible defeat in the delirious uplifting of accomplished conquest. It has the same meaning for the man of the forests and the sea as for the man threading the paths of the more dangerous wilderness of houses and streets. Men that had felt in their breasts the awful exultation such a look awakens become mere things of to-day—which is paradise; forget yesterday—which was suffering; care not for to-morrow—which may be perdition. They wish to live under that look for ever. It is the look of woman's surrender.

He understood, and, as if suddenly released from his invisible bonds, fell at her feet with a shout of joy, and, embracing her knees, hid his head in the folds of her dress, murmuring disjointed words of gratitude and love. Never before had he felt so proud as now, when at the feet of that woman that half belonged to his enemies. Her fingers played with his hair in an absent-minded caress as she stood absorbed in thought. The thing was done. Her mother was right. The man was her slave. As she glanced down at his kneeling form she felt a great pitying tenderness for that man she was used to call—even in her thoughts—the master of life. She lifted her eyes and looked sadly at the southern heavens under which lay the path of their lives—her own, and that man's at her feet. Did he not say himself that she was the light of his life? She would be his light and his wisdom; she would be his greatness and his strength; yet hidden from the eyes of all men she would be, above all, his only and lasting weakness. A very woman! In the sublime vanity of her kind she was thinking already of moulding a god from the clay at her feet. A god for others to worship. She was content to see him as he was now, and to feel him quiver at the slightest touch of her light fingers. And while her eyes looked sadly at the southern stars a faint smile seemed to be playing about her firm lips. Who can tell in the fitful light of a camp fire? It might have been a smile of triumph, or of conscious power, or of tender pity, or, perhaps, of love.

She spoke softly to him, and he rose to his feet, putting his arm round her in quiet consciousness of his ownership; she laid her head on his shoulder with a sense of defiance to all the world in the encircling protection of that arm. He was hers with all his

qualities and his faults. His strength and his courage, his recklessness and his daring, his simple wisdom and his savage cunning—all were hers. As they passed together out of the red light of the fire into the silver shower of rays that fell upon the clearing he bent his head over her face, and she saw in his eyes the dreamy intoxication of boundless felicity from the close touch of her slight figure clasped to his side. With a rhythmical swing of their bodies they walked through the light towards the outlying shadows of the forests that seemed to guard their happiness in solemn immobility. Their forms melted in the play of light and shadow at the foot of the big trees, but the murmur of tender words lingered over the empty clearing, grew faint, and died out. A sigh as of immense sorrow passed over the land in the last effort of the dying breeze, and in the deep silence which succeeded, the earth and the heavens were suddenly hushed up in the mournful contemplation of human love and human blindness.

They walked slowly back to the fire. He made for her a seat out of the dry branches, and, throwing himself down at her feet, laid his head in her lap and gave himself up to the dreamy delight of the passing hour. Their voices rose and fell, tender or animated as they spoke of their love and of their future. She, with a few skilful words spoken from time to time, guided his thoughts, and he let his happiness flow in a stream of talk passionate and tender, grave or menacing, according to the mood which she evoked. He spoke to her of his own island, where the gloomy forests and the muddy rivers were unknown. He spoke of its terraced fields, of the murmuring clear rills of sparkling water that flowed down the sides of great mountains, bringing life to the land and joy to its tillers. And he spoke also of the mountain peak that rising lonely above the belt of trees knew the secrets of the passing clouds, and was the dwelling-place of the mysterious spirit of his race, of the guardian genius of his house. He spoke of vast horizons swept by fierce winds that whistled high above the summits of burning mountains. He spoke of his forefathers that conquered ages ago the island of which he was to be the future ruler. And then as, in her interest, she brought her face nearer to his, he, touching lightly the thick tresses of her long hair, felt a sudden impulse to speak to her of the sea he loved so well; and he told her of its never-ceasing voice, to which he had listened as a child, wondering at its hidden meaning that no living man has penetrated yet; of its enchanting glitter; of its senseless and capricious fury; how its surface was for ever changing, and yet always enticing, while its depths were for ever the same, cold and cruel, and full of the wisdom of destroyed life. He told her how it held men slaves of its charm for a lifetime, and then, regardless of their devotion,

swallowed them up, angry at their fear of its mystery, which it would never disclose, not even to those that loved it most. While he talked, Nina's head had been gradually sinking lower, and her face almost touched his now. Her hair was over his eyes, her breath was on his forehead, her arms were about his body. No two beings could be closer to each other, yet she guessed rather than understood the meaning of his last words that came out after a slight hesitation in a faint murmur, dying out imperceptibly into a profound and significant silence: "The sea, O Nina, is like a woman's heart."

She closed his lips with a sudden kiss, and answered in a steady voice—

"But to the men that have no fear, O master of my life, the sea is ever true."

Over their heads a film of dark, thread-like clouds, looking like immense cobwebs drifting under the stars, darkened the sky with the presage of the coming thunderstorm. From the invisible hills the first distant rumble of thunder came in a prolonged roll which, after tossing about from hill to hill, lost itself in the forests of the Pantai. Dain and Nina stood up, and the former looked at the sky uneasily.

"It is time for Babalatchi to be here," he said. "The night is more than half gone. Our road is long, and a bullet travels quicker than the best canoe."

"He will be here before the moon is hidden behind the clouds," said Nina. "I heard a splash in the water," she added. "Did you hear it too?"

"Alligator," answered Dain shortly, with a careless glance towards the creek. "The darker the night," he continued, "the shorter will be our road, for then we could keep in the current of the main stream, but if it is light—even no more than now—we must follow the small channels of sleeping water, with nothing to help our paddles."

"Dain," interposed Nina, earnestly, "it was no alligator. I heard the bushes rustling near the landing-place."

"Yes," said Dain, after listening a while. "It cannot be Babalatchi, who would come in a big war canoe, and openly. Those that are coming, whoever they are, do not wish to make much noise. But you have heard, and now I can see," he went on quickly. "It is but one man. Stand behind me, Nina. If he is a friend he is welcome; if he is an enemy you shall see him die."

He laid his hand on his kriss, and waited the approach of his unexpected visitor. The fire was burning very low, and small clouds—precursors of the storm—crossed the face of the moon in rapid succession, and their flying shadows darkened the

clearing. He could not make out who the man might be, but he felt uneasy at the steady advance of the tall figure walking on the path with a heavy tread, and hailed it with a command to stop. The man stopped at some little distance, and Dain expected him to speak, but all he could hear was his deep breathing. Through a break in the flying clouds a sudden and fleeting brightness descended upon the clearing. Before the darkness closed in again Dain saw a hand holding some glittering object extended towards him, heard Nina's cry of "Father!" and in an instant the girl was between him and Almayer's revolver. Nina's loud cry woke up the echoes of the sleeping woods, and the three stood still as if waiting for the return of silence before they would give expression to their various feelings. At the appearance of Nina, Almayer's arm fell by his side, and he made a step forward. Dain pushed the girl gently aside.

"Am I a wild beast that you should try to kill me suddenly and in the dark, Tuan Almayer?" said Dain, breaking the strained silence. "Throw some brushwood on the fire," he went on, speaking to Nina, "while I watch my white friend, lest harm should come to you or to me, O delight of my heart!"

Almayer ground his teeth and raised his arm again. With a quick bound Dain was at his side; there was a short scuffle, during which one chamber of the revolver went off harmlessly, then the weapon wrenched, out of Almayer's hand, whirled through the air and fell in the bushes. The two men stood close together, breathing hard. The replenished fire threw out an unsteady circle of light and shone on the terrified face of Nina, who looked at them with outstretched hands.

"Dain!" she cried out warningly, "Dain!"

He waved his hand towards her in a reassuring gesture, and, turning to Almayer, said with great courtesy—

"Now we may talk, Tuan. It is easy to send out death, but can your wisdom recall the life? She might have been harmed," he continued, indicating Nina. "Your hand shook much; for myself I was not afraid."

"Nina!" exclaimed Almayer, "come to me at once. What is this sudden madness? What bewitched you? Come to your father, and together we shall try to forget this horrible nightmare!"

He opened his arms with the certitude of clasping her to his breast in another second. She did not move. As it dawned upon him that she did not mean to obey he felt a deadly cold creep into his heart, and pressing the palms of his hands to his temples, he looked down on the ground in mute despair. Dain took Nina by the arm and led her towards her father.

"Speak to him in the language of his people," he said. "He

is grieving—as who would not grieve at losing thee, my pearl! Speak to him the last words he shall hear spoken by that voice, which must be very sweet to him, but is all my life to me.”

He released her, and, stepping back a few paces out of the circle of light, stood in the darkness looking at them with calm interest. The reflection of a distant flash of lightning lit up the clouds over their heads, and was followed after a short interval by the faint rumble of thunder, which mingled with Almayer's voice as he began to speak.

“Do you know what you are doing? Do you know what is waiting for you if you follow that man? Have you no pity for yourself? Do you know that you shall be at first his plaything and then a scorned slave, a drudge, and a servant of some new fancy of that man?”

She raised her hand to stop him, and turning her head slightly asked—

“You hear this, Dain! Is it true?”

“By all the gods!” came the impassioned answer from the darkness—“by heaven and earth, by my head and thine I swear: this is a white man's lie. I have delivered my soul into your hands for ever; I breathe with your breath, I see with your eyes, I think with your mind, and I take you into my heart for ever.”

“You thief!” shouted the exasperated Almayer.

A deep silence succeeded this outburst, then the voice of Dain was heard again.

“Nay, Tuan,” he said in a gentle tone, “that is not true also. The girl came of her own will. I have done no more but to show her my love like a man; she heard the cry of my heart, and she came, and the dowry I have given to the woman you call your wife.”

Almayer groaned in his extremity of rage and shame. Nina laid her hand lightly on his shoulder, and the contact, light as the touch of a falling leaf, seemed to calm him. He spoke quickly, and in English this time.

“Tell me,” he said—“tell me, what have they done to you, your mother and that man? What made you give yourself up to that savage? For he is a savage. Between him and you there is a barrier that nothing can remove. I can see in your eyes the look of those who commit suicide when they are mad. You are mad. Don't smile. It breaks my heart. If I were to see you drowning before my eyes, and I without the power to help you, I could not suffer a greater torment. Have you forgotten the teaching of so many years?”

“No,” she interrupted, “I remember it well. I remember how it ended also. Scorn for scorn, contempt for contempt, hate

for hate. I am not of your race. Between your people and me there is also a barrier that nothing can remove. You ask why I want to go, and I ask you why I should stay."

He staggered as if struck in the face, but with a quick, unhesitating grasp she caught him by the arm and steadied him.

"Why you should stay!" he repeated slowly, in a dazed manner, and stopped short, astounded at the completeness of his misfortune.

"You told me yesterday," she went on again, "that I could not understand or see your love for me: it is so. How can I? No two human beings understand each other. They can understand but their own voices. You wanted me to dream your dreams, to see your own visions—the visions of life amongst the white faces of those who cast me out from their midst in angry contempt. But while you spoke I listened to the voice of my own self; then this man came, and all was still; there was only the murmur of his love. You call him a savage! What do you call my mother, your wife?"

"Nina!" cried Almayer, "take your eyes off my face."

She looked down directly, but continued speaking only a little above a whisper.

"In time," she went on, "both our voices, that man's and mine, spoke together in a sweetness that was intelligible to our ears only. You were speaking of gold then, but our ears were filled with the song of our love, and we did not hear you. Then I found that we could see through each other's eyes: that he saw things that nobody but myself and he could see. We entered a land where no one could follow us, and least of all you. Then I began to live."

She paused. Almayer sighed deeply. With her eyes still fixed on the ground she began speaking again.

"And I mean to live. I mean to follow him. I have been rejected with scorn by the white people, and now I am a Malay! He took me in his arms, he laid his life at my feet. He is brave; he will be powerful, and I hold his bravery and his strength in my hand, and I shall make him great. His name shall be remembered long after both our bodies are laid in the dust. I love you no less than I did before, but I shall never leave him, for without him I cannot live."

"If he understood what you have said," answered Almayer, scornfully, "he must be highly flattered. You want him as a tool for some incomprehensible ambition of yours. Enough, Nina. If you do not go down at once to the creek, where Ali is waiting with my canoe, I shall tell him to return to the settlement and bring the Dutch officers here. You cannot escape from this clear-

ing, for I have cast adrift your canoe. If the Dutch catch this hero of yours they will hang him as sure as I stand here. Now go."

He made a step towards his daughter and laid hold of her by the shoulder, his other hand pointing down the path to the landing-place.

"Beware!" exclaimed Dain; "this woman belongs to me!"

Nina wrenched herself free and looked straight at Almayer's angry face.

"No, I will not go," she said with desperate energy. "If he dies I shall die too!"

"You die?" said Almayer, contemptuously. "Oh, no! You shall live a life of lies and deception till some other vagabond comes along to sing; how did you say that? The song of love to you! Make up your mind quickly."

He waited for a while, and then added meaningly—

"Shall I call out to Ali?"

"Call out," she answered in Malay, "you that cannot be true to your own countrymen. Only a few days ago you were selling the powder of their destruction; now you want to give up to them the man that yesterday you called your friend. Oh, Dain," she said, turning towards the motionless but attentive figure in the darkness, "instead of bringing you life I bring you death, for he will betray unless I leave you for ever!"

Dain came into the circle of light, and, throwing his arm around Nina's neck, whispered in her ear—

"I can kill him where he stands, before a sound can pass his lips. For you it is to say yes or no. Babalatchi cannot be far now."

He straightened himself up, taking his arm off her shoulder, and confronted Almayer, who looked at them both with an expression of concentrated fury.

"No!" she cried, clinging to Dain in wild alarm. "No! Kill me! Then perhaps he will let you go. You do not know the mind of a white man. He would rather see me dead than standing where I am. Forgive me, your slave, but you must not." She fell at his feet sobbing violently and repeating, "Kill me! Kill me!"

"I want you alive," said Almayer, speaking also in Malay, with sombre calmness. "You go, or he hangs. Will you obey?"

Dain shook Nina off, and, making a sudden lunge, struck Almayer full in the chest with the handle of his kriss, keeping the point towards himself.

"Hai, look! It was easy for me to turn the point the other way," he said in his even voice. "Go, Tuan Putih," he added with dignity. "I give you your life, my life, and her life. I am the slave of this woman's desire, and she wills it so."

There was not a glimmer of light in the sky now, and the tops of the trees were as invisible as their trunks, being lost in the mass of clouds that hung low over the woods, the clearing, and the river. Every outline had disappeared in the intense blackness that seemed to have destroyed everything but space. Only the fire glimmered like a star forgotten in this annihilation of all visible things, and nothing was heard after Dain ceased speaking but the sobs of Nina, whom he held in his arms, kneeling beside the fire. Almayer stood looking down at them in gloomy thoughtfulness. As he was opening his lips to speak they were startled by a cry of warning by the riverside, followed by the splash of many paddles and the sound of voices.

"Babalatchi!" shouted Dain, lifting up Nina as he got upon his feet quickly.

"Ada! Ada!" came the answer from the panting statesman who ran up the path and stood amongst them. "Run to my canoe," he said to Dain excitedly, without taking any notice of Almayer. "Run! we must go. That woman has told them all!"

"What woman?" asked Dain, looking at Nina. Just then there was only one woman in the whole world for him.

"The she-dog with white teeth; the seven times accursed slave of Bulangi. She yelled at Abdulla's gate till she woke up all Sambir. Now the white officers are coming guided by her and Reshid. If you want to live, do not look at me, but go!"

"How do you know this?" asked Almayer.

"Oh, Tuan! what matters how I know! I have only one eye, but I saw lights in Abdulla's house and in his campong as we were paddling past. I have ears, and while we lay under the bank I have heard the messengers sent out to the white men's house."

"Will you depart without that woman who is my daughter?" said Almayer, addressing Dain, while Babalatchi stamped with impatience, muttering, "Run! Run at once!"

"No," answered Dain, steadily, "I will not go; to no man will I abandon this woman."

"Then kill me and escape yourself," sobbed out Nina.

He clasped her close, looking at her tenderly, and whispered, "We will never part, O Nina!"

"I shall not stay here any longer," broke in Babalatchi, angrily. "This is great foolishness. No woman is worth a man's life. I am an old man, and I know."

He picked up his staff, and, turning to go, looked at Dain as if offering him his last chance of escape. But Dain's face was hidden amongst Nina's black tresses, and he did not see this last appealing glance.

Babalatchi vanished in the darkness. Shortly after his disappearance they heard the war canoe leave the landing-place in the swish of the numerous paddles dipped in the water together. Almost at the same time Ali came up from the riverside, two paddles on his shoulder.

"Our canoe is hidden up the creek, Tuan Almayer," he said, "in the dense bush where the forest comes down to the water. I took it there because I heard from Babalatchi's paddlers that the white men are coming here."

"Wait for me there," said Almayer, "but keep the canoe hidden."

He remained silent, listening to Ali's footsteps, then turned to Nina.

"Nina," he said sadly "will you have no pity for me?"

There was no answer. She did not even turn her head, which was pressed close to Dain's breast.

He made a movement as if to leave them and stopped. By the dim glow of the burning-out fire he saw their two motionless figures. The woman's back turned to him with the long black hair streaming down over the white dress, and Dain's calm face looking at him above her head.

"I cannot," he muttered to himself. After a long pause he spoke again a little lower, but in an unsteady voice, "It would be too great a disgrace. I am a white man." He broke down completely there, and went on tearfully, "I am a white man, and of good family. Very good family," he repeated, weeping bitterly. "It would be a disgrace . . . all over the island, . . . the only white man on the east coast. No, it cannot be . . . white men finding my daughter with this Malay. My daughter!" he cried aloud, with a ring of despair in his voice.

He recovered his composure after a while and said distinctly—

"I will never forgive you, Nina—never! If you were to come back to me now, the memory of this night would poison all my life. I shall try to forget. I have no daughter. There used to be a half-caste woman in my house, but she is going even now. You, Dain, or whatever your name may be, I shall take you and that woman to the island at the mouth of the river myself. Come with me."

He led the way, following the bank as far as the forest. Ali answered to his call, and, pushing their way through the dense bush, they stepped into the canoe hidden under the overhanging branches. Dain laid Nina in the bottom, and sat holding her head on his knees. Almayer and Ali each took up a paddle. As they were going to push out Ali hissed warningly. All listened.

In the great stillness before the bursting out of the thunderstorm

they could hear the sound of oars working regularly in their row-locks. The sound approached steadily, and Dain, looking through the branches, could see the faint shape of a big white boat. A woman's voice said in a cautious tone—

"There is the place where you may land, white men; a little higher—there!"

The boat was passing them so close in the narrow creek that blades of the long oars nearly touched the canoe.

"Way enough! Stand by to jump on shore! He is alone and unarmed," was the quiet order in a man's voice, and in Dutch.

Somebody else whispered: "I think I can see a glimmer of a fire through the bush." And then the boat floated past them, disappearing instantly in the darkness.

"Now," whispered Ali, eagerly, "let us push out and paddle away."

The little canoe swung into the stream, and as it sprung forward in response to the vigorous dig of the paddles they could hear an angry shout.

"He is not by the fire. Spread out, men, and search for him!"

Blue lights blazed out in different parts of the clearing, and the shrill voice of a woman cried in accents of rage and pain—

"Too late! O senseless white men! He has escaped!"

12

"THAT is the place," said Dain, indicating with the blade of his paddle a small islet about a mile ahead of the canoe—"that is the place where Babalatchi promised that a boat from the prau would come for me when the sun is overhead. We will wait for that boat there."

Almayer, who was steering, nodded without speaking, and by a slight sweep of his paddle laid the head of the canoe in the required direction.

They were just leaving the southern outlet of the Pantai, which lay behind them in a straight and long vista of water shining between two walls of thick verdure that ran downwards and towards each other, till at last they joined and sank together in the far-away distance. The sun, rising above the calm waters of the Straits, marked its own path by a streak of light that glided upon the sea and darted up the wide reach of the river, a hurried messenger of light and life to the gloomy forests of the coast; and in this radiance of the sun's pathway floated the black canoe heading for the islet which lay bathed in sunshine, the yellow

sands of its encircling beach shining like an inlaid golden disc on the polished steel of the unwrinkled sea. To the north and south of it rose other islets, joyous in their brilliant colouring of green and yellow, and on the main coast the sombre line of mangrove bushes ended to the southward in the reddish cliffs of Tanjong Mirrah, advancing into the sea, steep and shadowless under the clear light of the early morning.

The bottom of the canoe grated upon the sand as the little craft ran upon the beach. Ali leaped on shore and held on while Dain stepped out carrying Nina in his arms, exhausted by the events and the long travelling during the night. Almayer was the last to leave the boat, and together with Ali ran it higher up on the beach. Then Ali, tired out by the long paddling, lay down in the shade of the canoe, and incontinently fell asleep. Almayer sat sideways on the gunwale, and with his arms crossed on his breast, looked to the southward upon the sea.

After carefully laying Nina down in the shade of the bushes growing in the middle of the islet, Dain threw himself beside her and watched in silent concern the tears that ran down from under her closed eyelids, and lost themselves in that fine sand upon which they both were lying face to face. These tears and this sorrow were for him a profound and disquieting mystery. Now, when the danger was past, why should she grieve? He doubted her love no more than he would have doubted the fact of his own existence, but as he lay looking ardently in her face, watching her tears, her parted lips, her very breath, he was uneasily conscious of something in her he could not understand. Doubtless she had the wisdom of perfect beings. He sighed. He felt something invisible that stood between them, something that would let him approach her so far, but no farther. No desire, no longing, no effort of will or length of life could destroy this vague feeling of their difference. With awe but also with great pride he concluded that it was her own incomparable perfection. She was his, and yet she was like a woman from another world. His! His! He exulted in the glorious thought; nevertheless her tears pained him.

With a wisp of her own hair which he took in his hand with timid reverence he tried in an access of clumsy tenderness to dry the tears that trembled on her eyelashes. He had his reward in a fleeting smile that brightened her face for the short fraction of a second, but soon the tears fell faster than ever, and he could bear it no more. He rose and walked towards Almayer, who still sat absorbed in his contemplation of the sea. It was a very, very long time since he had seen the sea—that sea that leads everywhere, brings everything, and takes away so much. He had almost

forgotten why he was there, and dreamily he could see all his past life on the smooth and boundless surface that glittered before his eyes.

Dain's hand laid on Almayer's shoulder recalled him with a start from some country very far away indeed. He turned round, but his eyes seemed to look rather at the place where Dain stood than at the man himself. Dain felt uneasy under the unconscious gaze.

"What do you want?" asked Almayer.

"She is crying," murmured Dain, softly.

"She is crying! Why?" asked Almayer, indifferently.

"I came to ask you. My Rance smiles when looking at the man she loves. It is the white woman that is crying now. You would know."

Almayer shrugged his shoulders and turned away again towards the sea.

"Go, Tuan Putih," urged Dain. "Go to her; her tears are more terrible to me than the anger of gods."

"Are they? You will see them more than once. She told me she could not live without you," answered Almayer, speaking without the faintest spark of expression in his face, "so it behoves you to go to her quick, for fear you may find her dead."

He burst into a loud and unpleasant laugh which made Dain stare at him with some apprehension, but got off the gunwale of the boat and moved slowly towards Nina, glancing up at the sun as he walked.

"And you go when the sun is overhead?" he said.

"Yes, Tuan. Then we go," answered Dain.

"I have not long to wait," muttered Almayer. "It is most important for me to see you go. Both of you. Most important," he repeated, stopping short and looking at Dain fixedly.

He went on again towards Nina, and Dain remained behind. Almayer approached his daughter and stood for a time looking down on her. She did not open her eyes, but hearing footsteps near her, murmured in a low sob, "Dain."

Almayer hesitated for a minute and then sank on the sand by her side. She, not hearing a responsive word, not feeling a touch, opened her eyes—saw her father, and sat up suddenly with a movement of terror.

"Oh, father!" she murmured faintly, and in that word there was expressed regret and fear and dawning hope.

"I shall never forgive you, Nina," said Almayer, in a dispassionate voice. "You have torn my heart from me while I dreamt of your happiness. You have deceived me. Your eyes that for me were like truth itself, lied to me in every glance—for how long?"

You know that best. When you were caressing my cheek you were counting the minutes to the sunset that was the signal for your meeting with that man—there!”

He ceased, and they both sat silent side by side, not looking at each other, but gazing at the vast expanse of the sea. Almayer's words had dried Nina's tears, and her look grew hard as she stared before her into the limitless sheet of blue that shone limpid, unwavering, and steady like heaven itself. He looked at it also, but his features had lost all expression, and life in his eyes seemed to have gone out. The face was a blank, without a sign of emotion, feeling, reason, or even knowledge of itself. All passion, regret, grief, hope, or anger—all were gone, erased by the hand of fate, as if after this last stroke everything was over and there was no need for any record. Those few who saw Almayer during the short period of his remaining days were always impressed by the sight of that face that seemed to know nothing of what went on within: like the blank wall of a prison enclosing sin, regrets, and pain, and wasted life, in the cold indifference of mortar and stones.

“What is there to forgive?” asked Nina, not addressing Almayer directly, but more as if arguing with herself. “Can I not live my own life as you have lived yours? The path you would have wished me to follow has been closed to me by no fault of mine.”

“You never told me,” muttered Almayer.

“You never asked me,” she answered, “and I thought you were like the others and did not care. I bore the memory of my humiliation alone, and why should I tell you that it came to me because I am your daughter? I knew you could not avenge me.”

“And yet I was thinking of that only,” interrupted Almayer, “and I wanted to give you years of happiness for the short day of your suffering. I only knew of one way.”

“Ah! but it was not my way!” she replied. “Could you give me happiness without life? Life!” she repeated with sudden energy that sent the word ringing over the sea. “Life that means power and love,” she added in a low voice.

“That!” said Almayer, pointing his finger at Dain standing close by and looking at them in curious wonder.

“Yes, that!” she replied, looking her father full in the face and noticing for the first time with a slight gasp of fear the unnatural rigidity of his features.

“I would have rather strangled you with my own hands,” said Almayer, in an expressionless voice which was such a contrast to the desperate bitterness of his feelings that it surprised even himself. He asked himself who spoke, and, after looking slowly

round as if expecting to see somebody, turned again his eyes towards the sea.

"You say that because you do not understand the meaning of my words," she said sadly. "Between you and my mother there never was any love. When I returned to Sambir I found the place which I thought would be a peaceful refuge for my heart, filled with weariness and hatred—and mutual contempt. I have listened to your voice and to her voice. Then I saw that you could not understand me; for was I not part of that woman? Of her who was the regret and shame of your life? I had to choose—I hesitated. Why were you so blind? Did you not see me struggling before your eyes? But, when he came, all doubt disappeared, and I saw only the light of the blue and cloudless heaven——"

"I will tell you the rest," interrupted Almayer: "when that man came I also saw the blue and the sunshine of the sky. A thunderbolt has fallen from that sky, and suddenly all is still and dark around me for ever. I will never forgive you, Nina; and tomorrow I shall forget you! I shall never forgive you," he repeated with mechanical obstinacy while she sat, her head bowed down as if afraid to look at her father.

To him it seemed of the utmost importance that he should assure her of his intention of never forgiving. He was convinced that his faith in her had been the foundation of his hopes, the motive of his courage, of his determination to live and struggle, and to be victorious for her sake. And now his faith was gone, destroyed by her own hands; destroyed cruelly, treacherously, in the dark; in the very moment of success. In the utter wreck of his affections and of all his feelings, in the chaotic disorder of his thoughts, above the confused sensation of physical pain that wrapped him up in a sting as of a whiplash curling round him from his shoulders down to his feet, only one idea remained clear and definite—not to forgive her; only one vivid desire—to forget her. And this must be made clear to her—and to himself—by frequent repetition. That was his idea of his duty to himself—to his race—to his respectable connections; to the whole universe unsettled and shaken by this frightful catastrophe of his life. He saw it clearly and believed he was a strong man. He had always prided himself upon his unflinching firmness. And yet he was afraid. She had been all in all to him. What if he should let the memory of his love for her weaken the sense of his dignity? She was a remarkable woman; he could see that; all the latent greatness of his nature—in which he honestly believed—had been transfused into that slight, girlish figure. Great things could be done! What if he should suddenly take her to his heart, forget

his shame, and pain, and anger, and—follow her! What if he changed his heart if not his skin and made her life easier between the two loves that would guard her from any mischance! His heart yearned for her. What if he should say that his love for her was greater than . . .

"I will never forgive you, Nina!" he shouted, leaping up madly in the sudden fear of his dream.

This was the last time in his life that he was heard to raise his voice. Henceforth he spoke always in a monotonous whisper like an instrument of which all the strings but one are broken in a last ringing clamour under a heavy blow.

She rose to her feet and looked at him. The very violence of his cry soothed her in an intuitive conviction of his love, and she hugged to her breast the lamentable remnants of that affection with the unscrupulous greediness of women who cling desperately to the very scraps and rags of love, any kind of love, as a thing that of right belongs to them and is the very breath of their life. She put both her hands on Almayer's shoulders, and looking at him tenderly, half playfully, she said—

"You speak so because you love me."

Almayer shook his head.

"Yes, you do," she insisted softly; then after a short pause she added, "and you will never forget me."

Almayer shivered slightly. She could not have said a more cruel thing.

"Here is the boat coming now," said Dain, his arm outstretched towards a black speck on the water between the coast and the islet.

They all looked at it and remained standing in silence till the little canoe came gently on the beach and a man landed and walked towards them. He stopped some distance off and hesitated.

"What news?" asked Dain.

"We have had orders secretly and in the night to take off from this islet a man and a woman. I see the woman. Which of you is the man?"

"Come, delight of my eyes," said Dain to Nina. "Now we go, and your voice shall be for my ears only. You have spoken your last words to the Tuan Putih, your father. Come."

She hesitated for a while, looking at Almayer, who kept his eyes steadily on the sea, then she touched his forehead in a lingering kiss, and a tear—one of her tears—fell on his cheek and ran down his immovable face.

"Good-bye," she whispered, and remained irresolute till he pushed her suddenly into Dain's arms.

"If you have any pity for me," murmured Almayer, as if repeating some sentence learned by heart, "take that woman away."

He stood very straight, his shoulders thrown back, his head held high, and looked at them as they went down the beach to the canoe, walking enlaced in each other's arms. He looked at the line of their footsteps marked in the sand. He followed their figures moving in the crude blaze of the vertical sun, in that light violent and vibrating, like a triumphal flourish of brazen trumpets. He looked at the man's brown shoulders, at the red sarong round his waist; at the tall, slender, dazzling white figure he supported. He looked at the white dress, at the falling masses of the long black hair. He looked at them embarking, and at the canoe growing smaller in the distance, with rage, despair, and regret in his heart, and on his face a peace as that of a carved image of oblivion. Inwardly he felt himself torn to pieces, but Ali who—now aroused—stood close to his master, saw on his features the blank expression of those who live in that hopeless calm which sightless eyes only can give.

The canoe disappeared, and Almayer stood motionless with his eyes fixed on its wake. Ali from under the shade of his hand examined the coast curiously. As the sun declined, the sea-breeze sprang up from the northward and shivered with its breath the glassy surface of the water.

"Dapat!" exclaimed Ali, joyously. "Got him, master! Got prau! Not there! Look more Tanah Mirrah side. Aha! That way! Master, see? Now plain. See?"

Almayer followed Ali's forefinger with his eyes for a long time in vain. At last he sighted a triangular patch of yellow light on the red background of the cliffs of Tanjong Mirrah. It was the sail of the prau that had caught the sunlight and stood out, distinct with its gay tint, on the dark red of the cape. The yellow triangle crept slowly from cliff to cliff, till it cleared the last point of land and shone brilliantly for a fleeting minute on the blue of the open sea. Then the prau bore up to the southward: the light went out of the sail, and all at once the vessel itself disappeared, vanishing in the shadow of the steep headland that looked on, patient and lonely, watching over the empty sea.

Almayer never moved. Round the little islet the air was full of the talk of the rippling water. The crested wavelets ran up the beach audaciously, joyously, with the lightness of young life, and died quickly, unresistingly, and graciously, in the wide curves of transparent foam on the yellow sand. Above the white clouds sailed rapidly southwards as if intent upon overtaking something. Ali seemed anxious.

"Master," he said timidly, "time to get house now. Long way off to pull. All ready, sir."

"Wait," whispered Almayer.

Now she was gone his business was to forget, and he had a strange notion that it should be done systematically and in order. To Ali's great dismay he fell on his hands and knees, and, creeping along the sand, erased carefully with his hand all traces of Nina's footsteps. He piled up small heaps of sand, leaving behind him a line of miniature graves right down to the water. After burying the last slight imprint of Nina's slipper he stood up, and, turning his face towards the headland where he had last seen the prau, he made an effort to shout out loud again his firm resolve to never forgive. Ali watching him uneasily saw only his lips move, but heard no sound. He brought his foot down with a stamp. He was a firm man—firm as a rock. Let her go. He never had a daughter. He would forget. He was forgetting already.

Ali approached him again, insisting on immediate departure, and this time he consented, and they went together towards their canoe, Almayer leading. For all his firmness he looked very dejected and feeble as he dragged his feet slowly through the sand on the beach; and by his side—invisible to Ali—stalked that particular fiend whose mission it is to jog the memories of men, lest they should forget the meaning of life. He whispered into Almayer's ear a childish prattle of many years ago. Almayer, his head bent on one side, seemed to listen to his invisible companion, but his face was like the face of a man that has died struck from behind—a face from which all feelings and all expression are suddenly wiped off by the hand of unexpected death.

They slept on the river that night, mooring their canoe under the bushes and lying down in the bottom side by side, in the absolute exhaustion that kills hunger, thirst, all feeling and all thought in the overpowering desire for that deep sleep which is like the temporary annihilation of the tired body. Next day they started again and fought doggedly with the current all the morning, till about midday they reached the settlement and made fast their little craft to the jetty of Lingard and Co. Almayer walked straight to the house, and Ali followed, paddles on shoulder, thinking that he would like to eat something. As they crossed the front courtyard they noticed the abandoned look of the place. Ali looked in at the different servants' houses: all were empty. In the back courtyard there was the same absence of sound and life. In the cooking-shed the fire was out and the black embers were cold. A tall, lean man came stealthily out of the banana

plantation, and went away rapidly across the open space looking at them with big, frightened eyes over his shoulder. Some vagabond without a master; there were many such in the settlement, and they looked upon Almayer as their patron. They prowled about his premises and picked their living there, sure that nothing worse could befall them than a shower of curses when they got in the way of the white man, whom they trusted and liked, and called a fool amongst themselves. In the house, which Almayer entered through the back verandah, the only living thing that met his eyes was his small monkey, which hungry and unnoticed for the last two days, began to cry and complain in monkey language as soon as it caught sight of the familiar face. Almayer soothed it with a few words and ordered Ali to bring in some bananas, then while Ali was gone to get them he stood in the doorway of the front verandah looking at the chaos of overturned furniture. Finally he picked up the table and sat on it while the monkey let itself down from the roof-stick by its chain and perched on his shoulder. When the bananas came they had their breakfast together; both hungry, both eating greedily and showering the skins round them recklessly, in the trusting silence of perfect friendship. Ali went away, grumbling, to cook some rice himself, for all the women about the house had disappeared; he did not know where. Almayer did not seem to care, and, after he finished eating, he sat on the table swinging his legs and staring at the river as if lost in thought.

After some time he got up and went to the door of a room on the right of the verandah. That was the office. The office of Lingard and Co. He very seldom went in there. There was no business now, and he did not want an office. The door was locked, and he stood biting his lower lip, trying to think of the place where the key could be. Suddenly he remembered: in the women's room hung upon a nail. He went over to the doorway where the red curtain hung down in motionless folds, and hesitated for a moment before pushing it aside with his shoulder as if breaking down some solid obstacle. A great square of sunshine entering through the window lay on the floor. On the left he saw Mrs. Almayer's big wooden chest, the lid thrown back, empty; near it the brass nails of Nina's European trunk shone in the large initials N. A. on the cover. A few of Nina's dresses hung on wooden pegs, stiffened in a look of offended dignity at their abandonment. He remembered making the pegs himself and noticed that they were very good pegs. Where was the key? He looked round and saw it near the door where he stood. It was red with rust. He felt very much annoyed at that, and directly afterwards wondered at his own feeling. What did it matter? There soon would be

no key—no door—nothing! He paused, key in hand, and asked himself whether he knew well what he was about. He went out again on the verandah and stood by the table thinking. The monkey jumped down, and, snatching a banana skin, absorbed itself in picking it to shreds industriously.

"Forget!" muttered Almayer, and that word started before him a sequence of events, a detailed programme of things to do. He knew perfectly well what was to be done now. First this, then that, and then forgetfulness would come easy. Very easy. He had a fixed idea that if he should not forget before he died he would have to remember to all eternity. Certain things had to be taken out of his life, stamped out of sight, destroyed, forgotten. For a long time he stood in deep thought, lost in the alarming possibilities of unconquerable memory, with the fear of death and eternity before him. "Eternity!" he said aloud, and the sound of that word recalled him out of his reverie. The monkey started, dropped the skin, and grinned up at him amicably.

He went towards the office door and with some difficulty managed to open it. He entered in a cloud of dust that rose under his feet. Books open with torn pages bestrewed the floor; other books lay about grimy and black, looking as if they had never been opened. Account books. In those books he had intended to keep day by day a record of his rising fortunes. Long time ago. A very long time. For many years there had been no record to keep on the blue and red ruled pages! In the middle of the room the big office desk, with one of its legs broken, careened over like the hull of a stranded ship; most of the drawers had fallen out, disclosing heaps of paper yellow with age and dirt. The revolving office chair stood in its place, but he found the pivot set fast when he tried to turn it. No matter. He desisted, and his eyes wandered slowly from object to object. All those things had cost a lot of money at the time. The desk, the paper, the torn books, and the broken shelves, all under a thick coat of dust. The very dust and bones of a dead and gone business. He looked at all these things, all that was left after so many years of work, of strife, of weariness, of discouragement, conquered so many times. And all for what? He stood thinking mournfully of his past life till he heard distinctly the clear voice of a child speaking amongst all this wreck, ruin, and waste. He started with a great fear in his heart, and feverishly began to rake in the papers scattered on the floor, broke the chair into bits, splintered the drawers by banging them against the desk, and made a big heap of all that rubbish in one corner of the room.

He came out quickly, slammed the door after him, turned the key, and, taking it out, ran to the front rail of the verandah, and,

with a great swing of his arm, sent the key whizzing into the river. This done he went back slowly to the table, called the monkey down, unhooked its chain, and induced it to remain quiet in the breast of his jacket. Then he sat again on the table and looked fixedly at the door of the room he had just left. He listened also intently. He heard a dry sound of rustling sharp cracks as of dry wood snapping; a whirr like that of a bird's wings when it rises suddenly, and then he saw a thin stream of smoke come through the keyhole. The monkey struggled under his coat. Ali appeared with his eyes starting out of his head.

"Master! House burn!" he shouted.

Almayer stood up holding by the table. He could hear the yells of alarm and surprise in the settlement. Ali wrung his hands, lamenting aloud.

"Stop this noise, fool!" said Almayer, quietly. "Pick up my hammock and blankets and take them to the other house. Quick, now!"

The smoke burst through the crevices of the door, and Ali, with the hammock in his arms, cleared in one bound the steps of the verandah.

"It has caught well," muttered Almayer to himself. "Be quiet, Jack," he added, as the monkey made a frantic effort to escape from its confinement.

The door split from top to bottom, and a rush of flame and smoke drove Almayer away from the table to the front rail of the verandah. He held on there till a great roar overhead assured him that the roof was ablaze. Then he ran down the steps of the verandah, coughing, half choked with the smoke that pursued him in bluish wreaths curling about his head.

On the other side of the ditch, separating Almayer's courtyard from the settlement, a crowd of the inhabitants of Sambir looked at the burning house of the white man. In the calm air the flames rushed up on high, coloured pale brick-red, with violet gleams in the strong sunshine. The thin column of smoke ascended straight and unwavering till it lost itself in the clear blue of the sky, and in the great empty space between the two houses the interested spectators could see the tall figure of the Tuan Putih, with bowed head and dragging feet, walking slowly away from the fire towards the shelter of "Almayer's Folly."

In that manner did Almayer move into his new house. He took possession of the new ruin, and in the undying folly of his heart set himself to wait in anxiety and pain for that forgetfulness which was so slow to come. He had done all he could. Every vestige of Nina's existence had been destroyed; and now with every sunrise he asked himself whether the longed-for oblivion would

come before sunset, whether it would come before he died? He wanted to live only long enough to be able to forget, and the tenacity of his memory filled him with dread and horror of death; for should it come before he could accomplish the purpose of his life he would have to remember for ever! He also longed for loneliness. He wanted to be alone. But he was not. In the dim light of the rooms with their closed shutters, in the bright sunshine of the verandah, wherever he went, whichever way he turned, he saw the small figure of a little maiden with pretty olive face, with long black hair, her little pink robe slipping off her shoulders, her big eyes looking up at him in the tender trustfulness of a petted child. Ali did not see anything, but he also was aware of the presence of a child in the house. In his long talks by the evening fires of the settlement he used to tell his intimate friends of Almayer's strange doings. His master had turned sorcerer in his old age. Ali said that often when Tuan Putih had retired for the night he could hear him talking to something in his room. Ali thought that it was a spirit in the shape of a child. He knew his master spoke to a child from certain expressions and words his master used. His master spoke in Malay a little, but mostly in English, which he, Ali, could understand. Master spoke to the child at times tenderly, then he would weep over it, laugh at it, scold it, beg of it to go away; curse it. It was a bad and stubborn spirit. Ali thought his master had imprudently called it up, and now could not get rid of it. His master was very brave; he was not afraid to curse this spirit in the very Presence; and once he fought with it. Ali had heard a great noise as of running about inside the room and groans. His master groaned. Spirits do not groan. His master was brave, but foolish. You cannot hurt a spirit. Ali expected to find his master dead next morning, but he came out very early, looking much older than the day before, and had no food all day.

So far Ali to the settlement. To Captain Ford he was much more communicative, for the good reason that Captain Ford had the purse and gave orders. On each of Ford's monthly visits to Sambir Ali had to go on board with a report about the inhabitant of "Almayer's Folly." On his first visit to Sambir, after Nina's departure, Ford had taken charge of Almayer's affairs. They were not cumbersome. The shed for the storage of goods was empty, the boats had disappeared, appropriated—generally in night-time—by various citizens of Sambir in need of means of transport. During a great flood the jetty of Lingard and Co. left the bank and floated down the river, probably in search of more cheerful surroundings; even the flock of geese—"the only geese on the east coast"—departed somewhere,

preferring the unknown dangers of the bush to the desolation of their old home. As time went on the grass grew over the black patch of ground where the old house used to stand, and nothing remained to mark the place of the dwelling that had sheltered Almayer's young hopes, his foolish dream of splendid future, his awakening, and his despair.

Ford did not often visit Almayer, for visiting Almayer was not a pleasant task. At first he used to respond listlessly to the old seaman's boisterous inquiries about his health; he even made efforts to talk, asking for news in a voice that made it perfectly clear that no news from this world had any interest for him. Then gradually he became more silent—not sulkily—but as if he was forgetting how to speak. He used also to hide in the darkest rooms of the house where Ford had to seek him out guided by the patter of the monkey galloping before him. The monkey was always there to receive and introduce Ford. The little animal seemed to have taken complete charge of its master, and whenever it wished for his presence on the verandah it would tug perseveringly at his jacket, till Almayer obediently came out into the sunshine, which he seemed to dislike so much.

One morning Ford found him sitting on the floor of the verandah, his back against the wall, his legs stretched stiffly out, his arms hanging by his side. His expressionless face, his eyes open wide with immobile pupils, and the rigidity of his pose, made him look like an immense man-doll broken and flung there out of the way. As Ford came up the steps he turned his head slowly.

"Ford," he murmured from the floor, "I cannot forget."

"Can't you?" said Ford, innocently, with an attempt at joviality: "I wish I was like you. I am losing my memory—age, I suppose; only the other day my mate——"

He stopped, for Almayer had got up, stumbled, and steadied himself on his friend's arm.

"Hallo! You are better to-day. Soon be all right." said Ford, cheerfully, but feeling rather scared.

Almayer let go his arm and stood very straight with his head up and shoulders thrown back, looking stonily at the multitude of suns shining in ripples of the river. His jacket and his loose trousers flapped in the breeze on his thin limbs.

"Let her go!" he whispered in a grating voice. "Let her go. To-morrow I shall forget. I am a firm man, . . . firm as a . . . rock, . . . firm. . . ."

Ford looked at his face—and fled. The skipper was a tolerably firm man himself—as those who had sailed with him could testify—but Almayer's firmness was altogether too much for his fortitude.

Next time the steamer called in Sambir Ali came on board early with a grievance. He complained to Ford that Jim-Eng the Chinaman had invaded Almayer's house, and actually had lived there for the last month.

"And they both smoke," added Ali.

"Phew! Opium, you mean?"

Ali nodded, and Ford remained thoughtful; then he muttered to himself, "Poor devil! The sooner the better now." In the afternoon he walked up to the house.

"What are you doing here?" he asked of Jim-Eng, whom he found strolling about on the verandah.

Jim-Eng explained in bad Malay, and speaking in that monotonous, uninterested voice of an opium smoker pretty far gone, that his house was old, the roof leaked, and the floor was rotten. So, being an old friend for many, many years, he took his money, his opium, and two pipes, and came to live in this big house.

"There is plenty of room. He smokes, and I live here. He will not smoke long," he concluded.

"Where is he now?" asked Ford.

"Inside. He sleeps," answered Jim-Eng, wearily.

Ford glanced in through the doorway. In the dim light of the room he could see Almayer lying on his back on the floor, his head on a wooden pillow, the long white beard scattered over his breast, the yellow skin of the face, the half-closed eyelids showing the whites of the eye only. . . .

He shuddered and turned away. As he was leaving he noticed a long strip of faded red silk, with some Chinese letters on it, which Jim-Eng had just fastened to one of the pillars.

"What's that?" he asked.

"That," said Jim-Eng, in his colourless voice, "that is the name of the house. All the same like my house. Very good name."

Ford looked at him for a while and went away. He did not know what the crazy-looking maze of the Chinese inscription on the red silk meant. Had he asked Jim-Eng, that patient Chinaman would have informed him with proper pride that its meaning was: "House of heavenly delight."

In the evening of the same day Babalatchi called on Captain Ford. The captain's cabin opened on deck, and Babalatchi sat astride on the high step, while Ford smoked his pipe on the settee inside. The steamer was leaving next morning, and the old statesman came as usual for a last chat.

"We had news from Bali last moon," remarked Babalatchi. "A grandson is born to the old Rajah, and there is great rejoicing."

Ford sat up interested.

"Yes," went on Babalatchi, in answer to Ford's look. "I told him. That was before he began to smoke."

"Well, and what?" asked Ford.

"I escaped with my life," said Babalatchi, with perfect gravity, "because the white man is very weak and fell as he rushed upon me." Then, after a pause, he added, "She is mad with joy."

"Mrs. Almayer, you mean?"

"Yes, she lives in our Rajah's house. She will not die soon. Such women live a long time," said Babalatchi, with a slight tinge of regret in his voice. "She has dollars, and she has buried them, but we know where. We had much trouble with those people. We had to pay a fine and listen to threats from the white men, and now we have to be careful." He sighed and remained silent for a long while. Then with energy:

"There will be fighting. There is a breath of war on the island's. Shall I live long enough to see? . . . Ah, Tuan!" he went on, more quietly, "the old times were best. Even I have sailed with Lanun men, and boarded in the night silent ships with white sails. That was before an English Rajah ruled in Kuching. Then we fought amongst ourselves and were happy. Now when we fight with you we can only die!"

He rose to go. "Tuan," he said, "you remember the girl that Bulangi had? Her that caused all the trouble?"

"Yes," said Ford. "What of her?"

"She grew thin and could not work. Then Bulangi, who is a thief and a pig-eater, gave her to me for fifty dollars. I sent her amongst my women to grow fat. I wanted to hear the sound of her laughter, but she must have been bewitched, and . . . she died two days ago. Nay, Tuan. Why do you speak bad words? I am old—that is true—but why should I not like the sight of a young face and the sound of a young voice in my house?" He paused, and then added with a little mournful laugh, "I am like a white man talking too much of what is not men's talk when they speak to one another."

And he went off looking very sad.

The crowd massed in a semicircle before the steps of "Almayer's Folly," swayed silently backwards and forwards, and opened out before the group of white-robed and turbaned men advancing through the grass towards the house. Abdulla walked first, supported by Reshid and followed by all the Arabs in Sambir. As they entered the lane made by the respectful throng there was a subdued murmur of voices, where the word "Mati" was the

only one distinctly audible. Abdulla stopped and looked round slowly.

"Is he dead?" he asked.

"May you live!" answered the crowd in one shout, and then there succeeded a breathless silence.

Abdulla made a few paces forward and found himself for the last time face to face with his old enemy. Whatever he might have been once he was not dangerous now, lying stiff and lifeless in the tender light of the early day. The only white man on the east coast was dead, and his soul, delivered from the trammels of his earthly folly, stood now in the presence of Infinite Wisdom. On the upturned face there was that serene look which follows the sudden relief from anguish and pain, and it testified silently before the cloudless heaven that the man lying there under the gaze of indifferent eyes had been permitted to forget before he died.

Abdulla looked down sadly at this Infidel he had fought so long and had bested so many times. Such was the reward of the Faithful! Yet in the Arab's old heart there was a feeling of regret for that thing gone out of his life. He was leaving fast behind him friendships, and enmities, successes, and disappointments—all that makes up a life; and before him was only the end. Prayer would fill up the remainder of the days allotted to the True Believer! He took in his hand the beads that hung at his waist.

"I found him here, like this, in the morning," said Ali, in a low and awed voice.

Abdulla glanced coldly once more at the serene face.

"Let us go," he said, addressing Reshid.

And as they passed through the crowd that fell back before them, the beads in Abdulla's hand clicked, while in a solemn whisper he breathed out piously the name of Allah! The Merciful! The Compassionate!

